

# Educational Attainment and Equalities in Tameside, from Early Years to Key Stage Four

# Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Introduction .....	13
Attainment and Disabilities .....	16
Attainment and Ethnicity .....	21
Attainment and Gender .....	30
Attainment and LGBTQ+ Students .....	32
Attainment and Socio-Economic Status .....	34
Attainment and Looked After Children .....	40
Attainment and Attendance .....	44
Conclusion .....	48
References .....	49

# Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to examine the educational achievement of students in Tameside, through the lens of equalities, identifying trends in attainment data and areas for celebration and improvement, using case studies in other boroughs to identify successful mitigations and interventions.

The paper is split into the following sections:

- Attainment and Disability
- Attainment and Ethnicity
- Attainment and Gender
- Attainment and LGBTQ+ Students
- Attainment and Socio-Economic Status
- Attainment and Looked After Children (LAC)
- Attainment and Attendance

Whilst Covid is not the focus of this paper it is important to contextualise the attainment data against the backdrop of the pandemic, which led to significant disruptions in face-to-face teaching, affecting students' learning outcomes. Nationally it is estimated that nearly a quarter of students had no formal schooling or tutoring during the first national lockdown, and catching up this time will be a multi-year focus. While reading standards improved post-lockdowns, writing standards suffered. In particular, the challenges faced by students with English as an additional language (EAL) due to reduced face-to-face teaching time and limited peer socialisation are significant.

## Attainment and Disabilities

There is a complex relationship between attainment and disability, and students with disabilities encounter unique obstacles in achieving their educational goals. The national-level data around this shows there has been an increased demand for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), particularly amongst the Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) cohort, this increasing demand for EHCPs has strained resources, leading to delays in assessments and support provision. These delays can negatively impact students' educational progress, motivation, and confidence, and extend beyond the individual student, impacting teachers, schools, and families who are left grappling with the complex task of trying to meet student needs without the support that an EHCP can provide.

Student disabilities encompasses a wide spectrum of conditions, ranging from physical disabilities, sensory impairments, learning disabilities, and neurodevelopmental disorders. Inclusive education is significant in allowing students with disabilities to access mainstream education. Across the borough, the approach to accessibility plans is inconsistent. Inconsistencies in the quality and availability of accessibility plans across schools can lead to an unequal experience for students. Research has shown that parents and carers often lack information about accessibility plans, often not being aware that they exist, and for those who do, often facing struggles or delays when asking schools to see the current accessibility plan. There is a need for standardised accessibility plans in schools to ensure equitable education for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are more likely to face absenteeism due to health-related challenges and the increased effort required to navigate educational environments. Chronic illness and disability can lead to social and emotional difficulties, exacerbating challenges in educational attainment. The focus on attendance awards in schools may unintentionally exclude students with disabilities who cannot achieve regular attendance. It is crucial to make schools inclusive and accessible for all students, especially those with disabilities. Reasonable adjustments must be made to accommodate students with physical or mental disabilities, schools should not wait for students to face distress before providing necessary accommodations. Proactive intervention and involving students and parents in creating support services are essential for creating an inclusive learning environment.

## Attainment and Ethnicity

Ethnic inequalities can be seen at all levels of education, both nationally and within Tameside. Tameside is becoming an increasingly diverse borough, whilst a majority of students are White, around 11.9% are Asian, 3.3% are Black, 6.3% are Mixed Ethnicity, 0.63% are Chinese, and 1.2% are Other Ethnic Groups.

The differences in attainment can be down to a number of factors, including socio-economic status and those with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Studies have found that it takes around 5 – 7 years for bilingual students to become fully competent in English and catch up with their peers. This can affect their academic success, particularly in subjects such as English Literature and English Language, as a student arriving at Key Stage 3 will be unlikely to have achieved a high level of fluency by the time they are sitting their GCSEs. There needs to be more targeted data collection in the borough around language fluency.

The intersect of gender and ethnicity can also shape educational outcomes, reflecting broader social biases and systemic inequalities. The impact of unconscious racial bias cannot be overlooked, black boys in particular have historically been subject to pre-emptive punishment, which can result in higher rates of suspension and expulsion. Similarly differing gender norms across cultures can dictate expectations and opportunities, though these disparities can be shifted, a 2014 study revealing that gender gaps where male education is valued more highly than female education in the countries of origin has largely reversed by the second generation.

There is also a distinction between “voluntary minorities” such as immigrant groups who may be recent arrivals to the country, and “involuntary minorities” such as white, working class pupils in England; and their approaches to and belief in the transformative power of education. This also impacts student attainment.

Mentoring programs like the Black Caribbean Achievement Project (BCAP) have shown positive effects on the academic success of ethnic minority students. BCAP provided academic support, group projects, and outreach work to improve self-esteem, manage emotions, and excel in the classroom. Mentored students saw improvements in test scores, self-esteem, and motivation, highlighting the importance of such programs in supporting students.

## Attainment and Gender

There is a documented gender gap in educational attainment, with girls outperforming boys at GCSE level but being underrepresented in Higher Education, especially in subjects with high returns, meaning that the subject of study and gender representation contributes to the gender pay gap. The gender gap is consistent and persistent over time, and there has been little recent research into this. Though Tameside has a smaller gender gap in some metrics than the national picture. Factors involved in the gender attainment gap fall on the side of both nature and nurture. Ranging from societal perceptions of “masculine” and “feminine” subject, of the value of academic success, and the impact of puberty (and the age at which it occurs) on educational success.

The issue of gender equality in education requires a multifaceted approach involving communities and institutions. Much of the data focuses around gender parity, which is made up of the ratio of boys to girls or women to men in a given aspect of education. A critical view would argue that this approach is inadequate and the approach must be much more complex.

The gender gap in Tameside is lower than nationally, particularly in English. (Post-lockdown reading attainment at KS2 also improved by twice the national average), demonstrating this as a strength in Tameside’s education system.

As students are giving long-term consideration to their academic careers when choosing GCSE options at the end of KS3, any targeted intervention to engage more women in STEM subjects/ subjects where they are underrepresented at Higher Education, must begin before this point.

## Attainment and LGBTQ+ Students

The data around LGBTQ+ students and educational attainment is largely non-existent. We do not track attainment by this metric, and it would likely be impossible to do so due to the complex nature of self-discovery and coming out. This in turn can make it difficult to implement effective and measurable policies and support systems aimed at improving the educational journey. Whilst directly collecting data on LGBTQ+ students' educational attainment may be challenging, there is broader evidence available on the impact of homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying (HBT Bullying) on students' educational experience. When LGBTQ+ students (or those who are perceived to be LGBTQ+) face this bullying, it can lead to poor attendance, decreased engagement, and mental distress, impacting their academic success. The government recently axed their HBT bullying programme, which resulted in concerned statements from a number of LGBTQ+ charities who were aware that without the additional funding the government had been provided, schools would have to prioritise already stretched budgets and their willingness to spend on this particular issue would be eclipsed by other needs. The well-documented rise of transphobic rhetoric, alongside the government removing their financial support for anti-HBT bullying programmes, could send a worrying message to Queer youth about their safety and acceptance in schools.

Creating inclusive environments and addressing bullying are crucial steps towards improving educational outcomes for LGBTQ+ students.

## Attainment and Socio-Economic Status

Children from disadvantaged households tend to do worse at every stage of school. This gap in attainment nationally has remained largely consistent for over a decade, with little to no sign of closing.

Family background and economic status significantly influence educational attainment. Economic uncertainty, such as parental job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic, was reported to have a greater impact on children's socio-emotional skills and learning abilities than previously considered. We lack borough specific data for the extent of this employment uncertainty, though we know that a significant portion of Tameside's largest employment sector (retail) will have been affected. Addressing socio-economic inequalities is essential in promoting educational equity.

Reports indicate that 4.3 million children in the UK are living in poverty. In Tameside, a significant number of children are also living in poverty, over 16,000 living in relative low income families and over 12,000 living in absolute low-income families. The Trussell Trust provided 2264 Food Parcels to families with children in Tameside in 2023.

Research shows that children facing persistent poverty or poor parental mental health are more likely to have poor mental and physical health. Children exposed to both factors have significantly higher odds of mental health issues compared to children in low-adversity groups.

The cost of a minimum socially acceptable standard of living for households with children in the UK has increased by 18% in the last year. Education is a crucial aspect of a dignified standard of living for families with children. Nationally and locally, income has not kept pace with inflation, making it more difficult to meet this minimum cost. The pandemic highlighted the importance of access to technology and the internet for education. The total cost for meeting educational needs is estimated to be over £6,000 in primary school and £12,291 in secondary school.

Students eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieve lower GCSE attainment compared to other students. Nationally in 2022, only 47% of FSM students achieved a standard pass in English and Maths GCSEs, while 75% of non-FSM students did. In Greater Manchester specifically 29% of FSM students achieve a pass in English and maths compared to 54% of non-eligible FSM students. This attainment gap persists throughout all levels their educational careers and impacts their qualifications as adults, affecting their earning potential. Children from deprived households tend to have lower qualifications compared to those from affluent families.

When looking at data around socio-economic status and educational attainment household income is used to measure poverty, but financial abuse is not considered. It is worth noting this as it means that there are households where the total income is above any poverty measure and means they will not register as eligible for benefits and/or FSMs; but members of that household will functionally be living in similar circumstances to households in absolute poverty. This example of hidden poverty is almost impossible to measure and therefore increasingly difficult to address, but an example of how there is likely more poverty than we can be aware of through the data, and also a consideration when considering who support would be available to and which students should be excluded.

## Attainment and Looked After Children (LAC)

Children in care have consistently lower educational attainment than peers who live with their birth families. Particularly in Tameside the academic success of LAC worsens as they get older, KS4 metrics comparing unfavourably with KS4. However, metrics often define “education” narrowly, focusing on traditional in-school achievements with which this population typically struggles. This cohort is almost four times more likely to have a special educational need than all children and are almost nine times more likely to have an EHCP than the average of all children. For those on EHCPs and then with SEND support, social, emotional and mental health is the most common primary type of special educational need. Looked After Children generally progress less in writing and maths but perform as well as or better than non-looked after children in other subjects when they have no identified SEN or receive SEN support.

Children in care may feel a lack of control over their outcomes, leading to behaviours like preferring isolation. Tameside’s exclusion rate for Looked After Children is notably high. Looked After Children can face challenges in forming relationships both with their peers and with the adults in their lives. In the midst of navigating unfamiliar environments and adapting to new locations, new schools, and new caregivers, the need for social connections can take a backseat as more basic survival instincts take priority.

Difficulties in forming relationships can hinder their engagement in learning, emphasising the need for a holistic approach to address their social and emotional needs in an educational setting.

Various reports have provided recommendations for supporting looked after children in terms of attendance and attainment strategies. These recommendations include cohesive inclusion strategies, reduction of exclusions, and a team approach involving schools, carers, and other key adults. The importance of positive relationships with key adults, high educational aspirations, and encouragement for success are highlighted as crucial for the academic achievement of children in care. Much of the information related to this is sourced from national-level data.

## Attainment and Attendance

Poor attendance and persistent absenteeism can significantly impact a student's educational attainment by leading to gaps in knowledge, social isolation, and barriers to achieving their full potential. The national conversation around this is very prominent at the moment.

It is the responsibility of all parties involved in caring for children to prioritise and support attendance. Children not receiving suitable education are at risk of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour and experiencing social disengagement and it is important to identify these children and ensure they are receiving the necessary support. Collaboration among parents, carers, schools, and organisations is crucial to safeguarding children and providing them with a quality education.

There needs to be a well-communicated plan for reintegrating excluded children into mainstream schooling. Exclusions should be viewed as an opportunity to assess a child's needs and implement a plan to address their behaviour. Safeguarding concerns should trigger referrals to support services, and effective communication between schools and external services is essential. The impacts of absenteeism are discussed at a national level.

## Recommendations

This paper proposes a number of recommendations inspired by existing research and case studies of successful stories from other boroughs. These are

### Attainment and Disability

Audit Accessibility Plans and generate standards and best practice to which schools must adhere.

- Support and adaptations should be available to children who require them without the need for an EHCP to be in place, putting the child and parents' voices at the heart of their support
- Ensure that attendance goals and the focus on attendance as recommended by THING is balanced with the Disability Rights UK recommendations on what "Good Attendance" looks like for disabled students.

### Attainment and Ethnicity

- Collect more accurate and specific data on language proficiency to better inform targeted support
- Racial Bias training, with focus on pre-emptive punishment
- Foster relationships with local communities with the goal to develop mentoring programmes

### Attainment and Gender

- Interventions to encourage long-term study of STEM or high return subjects targeted at female students to happen before the close of Key Stage 3
- Attainment and LGBTQ+ Students
- Invest in training key members of staff to empower them to effectively deal with HBT bullying

### Attainment and Socio-Economic Status

- Programmes to focus on the socio-emotional development of students
- Schools to explore flexible payment options or alternative models for families to allow more equal access to school events (i.e. school proms)
- Support the running of programmes such as Breakfast clubs and ensure adequate funding

### Attainment and Looked After Children

- Team Around the School Approach – create communication and connectedness between various bodies (i.e. family hubs and schools)
- Examination and understanding of educational priorities amongst the borough's LAC
- Examination of social networks of LAC that can lead to social isolation
- Look at data sharing practices between Social Care, Early Help, and Education

### Attainment and Attendance

- Include young carers in the production of Young Carers' Strategies
- Include children and young people in the development of absence and exclusion strategies
- Involve schools in local safeguarding partnerships
- Create child-friendly versions of school policies that children and young people can access and understand
- Move away from attendance awards and/or counter them with an equal option so students who cannot achieve them will not become further discouraged

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to examine the educational attainment of Tameside students through the lens of equalities, identifying trends in attainment data areas for celebration and improvement using case studies in other boroughs to identify successful mitigations and interventions.

This paper is split into the following sections:

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- Attainment and Attendance

- 1.2 Whilst Covid is not a focus of this paper, it is important to contextualise the attainment data against the backdrop of the pandemic, which has disproportionately affected Greater Manchester. GM spent longer under covid restrictions than other areas in the country. This, alongside self-isolation rules, high infection rates, and “bubbles bursting” directly translated to a significant loss of face-to-face teaching time. For disadvantaged students without the means or space to successfully learn from home, or who had additional educational needs that could not be met in the home-learning environment, there were and are still increased impacts from the pandemic and the loss of that time.

For example, at Key Stage 1 the impact on pupils achieving the expected standard at writing dropped significantly in comparison other metrics such as reading. Reading being 9% lower in 2022 than in 2019, whereas writing is 12% lower than 2019. This is likely because writing requires more teacher intervention than reading, and therefore will have suffered more during the closures<sup>1</sup>. Reading, however, can be practiced with minimal intervention once a child has a basic confidence level<sup>2</sup>.

In the last academic year 29% of 11 year olds nationally left primary school without the writing skills expected for their age<sup>3</sup>, and a third of 16 year olds (34.9%) did not achieve a grade four or above in English and maths GCSEs.<sup>4</sup>

A report released in 2024<sup>5</sup> showed that, nationally, fewer than 3 in 10 (28.7%) of 8 – 18 year olds say they enjoy writing in their free time, which is the lowest level recorded since 2010. 11.1% of children and young people said they wrote daily in their free time, a drop of 8.2 percentage points since 2023; and 1 in 3 (35.7%) rarely or never write in their free time, and increase of 12.7 percentage points.

Comparatively 2 in 5 (43.4%) of children and young people aged 8 – 18 said they enjoyed reading in their free time in the most recent National Literacy Trust survey<sup>6</sup>. Children in receipt of free school meals were less likely to enjoy reading (39.5%) compared to their peers who did not receive free school meals (43.8%). And fewer boys than girls said they enjoyed reading, 40.5% compared to 45.3%. This gap has closed significantly over the last decade, however this is largely due to a decrease in the number of girls who said they enjoyed reading, rather than an increase in boys saying they enjoyed it.

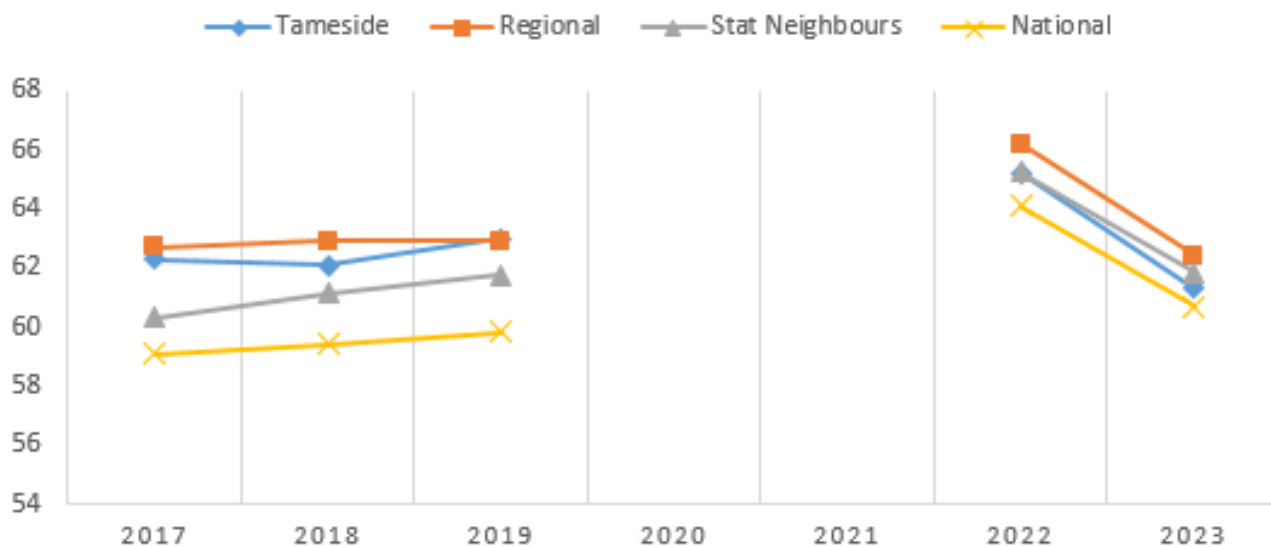
The standard in year one phonics also dropped in 2022. Tameside was starting from a lower point of attainment compared to nationally, and the drop whilst slight has brought the borough in line with national trends. The point here that will be explored later in the paper is the impact that the loss of face-to-face teaching time and also peer socialisation has had on students with English as an additional language (EAL) as they will typically have spent more time at home speaking languages other than English, which could negatively impact their scores.

The trends continue into KS2, where reading has strengthened post-lockdowns, but writing suffered significantly. In fact, the percentage of students reaching the expected standard in reading had gone up by 4% between 2019 and 2022, whereas nationally and regionally this number was half that at 2%. In terms of KS2 maths Tameside's decline was significant (from 79% to 70%), but this followed national trends. For FSM students at KS2, Maths and Reading attainment has gone up, with only writing going down.

Much of the GCSE data from 2020 and 2021 is omitted, where it has been included it is important to note that adjustments were made to support students and make exams fairer during the those years. This included adjusting the grade boundaries, introducing a choice of content or topics in some exams, and exam boards giving advanced information about the focus of exams. This was to acknowledge the recovery period schools and students were in, and the reintroduction of the summer exam series.

In 2020 and 2021 students received 'centre assessed grades'. The Department for Education (DfE) have stated that 2022 grades should not be compared to '20 and '21. Comparing the 2019 grades to 2022, the percentage of students achieving a 9-4 pass in English and Maths (a level 4 being closest to a C in the previous letter grading system), has increased from 63% to 65.2%, our statistical neighbours also achieved 65.2%, nationally this number was 64.4%. These mitigations were not in place for 2023, it was expected that grades would go back down to at least the 2019 level, if not more, making the impact of covid much clearer on that GCSE cohort. The reality was that the percentage of pupils achieving a 9-4 in English and Maths was 1.7% lower in 2023 than in 2019. Regionally this was only 0.5% lower, nationally 0.9% higher, and for our statistical neighbours 0.07% higher.

## PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ACHIEVING A 9 - 4 IN ENGLISH AND MATHS



Nationally it is estimated that nearly a quarter of students had no formal schooling or tutoring during the first national lockdown. Catching up on this lost time will be a multi-year focus, and this context should be kept in mind as the discussion around attainment continues. In some regards, what is needed to recover attainment, is time.

## 2. Attainment and Disability

- 2.1 Students with disabilities face unique challenges in pursuit of their educational goals, there is a complex relationship between attainment and disability, especially when discussing lost face-to-face teaching time. The EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) has been particularly impacted by a lack of social interaction during key development years, and nationally there is increased demand for Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP) requests from this cohort.
- 2.2 The increasing demand for EHCPs has put a significant strain on available resources, leading to longer waiting periods for assessments and, subsequently, delays in providing the support students require. Nationally almost half of all requests for an EHCP take longer than the legally mandated 20 week period (49.2%)<sup>7</sup>. This extended waiting period can have a detrimental impact on attainment. As students await the completion of EHCP assessments, they are often left without access to necessary accommodations, specialised services, and tailored educational support. This gap in support can lead to frustration, disengagement, behavioural problems, and the exacerbation of educational challenges. Consequently these delays can hinder a student's overall educational progress and affect motivation, self-esteem, and confidence. The knock-on effect of delayed EHCP assessments extends beyond the individual student, impacting teachers, schools, and families who are left grappling with the complex task of trying to meet students' needs without the essential guidance and support provided by EHCPs. To tackle the challenges related to delayed EHCP assessments and their impact on educational attainment, it is crucial to recognise that this is an issue of a fundamental imbalance between the increasing demand for EHCPs and the available capacity to efficiently process these assessments. It is therefore advisable to explore potential solutions, such as creating interim resources or plans for students while they are waiting for EHCP assessments, to ensure that they receive some levels of support and accommodations during this waiting period.
- 2.3 The Council for Disabled Children recommends keeping EHCPs as simple as possible, using a less-is-more approach. They argue to avoid too much historical or complex medical information, and that EHCPs should focus on the need, as a diagnostic label does not describe need. EHCPs should focus on the practical implications of any health conditions or impairments on different areas of a child or young person's life, in such a way that it can be understood by a non-specialist. An adaptation that works for one child will not necessarily work for a different child with the same condition. They also go on to discuss elements of an EHCP such as short-term service level targets being included in an appendix, not as outcomes. And where appropriate, outcomes should be joint across education, health and social care. EHCPs should set out exactly what is going to happen, who is going to do it, what skills, qualifications, or training they need, how often it will be made available, and when it will be reviewed.

- 2.4 Student disabilities encompasses a wide spectrum of conditions, ranging from physical disabilities, sensory impairments, learning disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders. Inclusive education is significant in allowing students with disabilities, a diverse group with varying needs, in accessing mainstream education.

Since 2002 all schools require published accessibility plans, these are a statutory requirement for schools and are the responsibility of the governing body. This shows their commitment to, over a prescribed period, increasing the extent to which disabled children and young people can participate in the school curriculum and creating an inclusive and accessible environment. This includes improving the supply of information to parents of disabled children and young people, physical access to the grounds, and teaching and assessment to meet individual need.

These plans should be fluid, adaptable, and reviewed regularly to reflect the ever-changing needs of the student population. The current landscape of accessibility plans within the borough reveals a notable inconsistency from school to school, with some having highly detailed and comprehensive plans, whilst others are much sparser and much less informative. These discrepancies could result in an inequitable experience for students with disabilities.

There is no oversight on these documents and little uniformity in the quality of the approach taken. This leads to an inequality in information for parents to access. The two examples (APPENDIX 1, APPENDIX 2) both from Tameside schools demonstrate this. In order to allow disabled students the ability to participate in their education to the fullest extent, this information needs to be open, accurate, and easy to find. Consistent, high quality approaches to accessibility plans will ensure all students and their families and carers can have the information needed to succeed.

- 2.5 According to a Family Resources Survey of 239 parents across the country only around a fifth (21.3%) had heard of accessibility plans and of those, where those plans were not available online, over half (58.8%) had to wait over a month to receive information regarding accessibility and their child's school. Children with disabilities and their parents/carers are largely uninformed of the existence of accessibility plans and are rarely informed in their production, development, or review. According to a paper from the Alliance for Inclusive Education<sup>8</sup>, this lack of coproduction left parents feeling as though accessibility plans were simply paper exercises with no real-world impact on the wellbeing of their child in school. This disparity highlights a need for consistency and a standardised approach. It is essential to make sure that there is equal support and information regarding that support borough-wide, to ensure that every student is receiving an equitable education, and each parent/carer has access to useful and concise information regarding the accessibility of their schools.

2.6 It is recommended that there be work undertaken to identify best practice around the creation of accessibility plans, and clear standards for the content, implementation, and monitoring of plans throughout the entire borough.

By adopting a standardised framework for accessibility plans, the borough can ensure consistency in the provision of accommodations and support irrespective of the educational institution, promoting fairness and streamlining administrative efforts. In addition, a unified approach can help establish common metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of accessibility plans, developing an area for a data driven system that can adapt and develop over time; as well as giving schools the opportunity to see and utilise best practice from other educational institutions within the borough.

The goal of this should be that, over time, the culture and attitudes of the school community become more welcoming, outcomes for disabled pupils improve, and the school does not have to make so many individual adjustments for individual pupils because, in the widest sense, the school is more accessible for all pupils.

2.7 One of the critical issues affecting educational attainment among students with disabilities is the heightened likelihood of absenteeism. Students with disabilities often face more significant health-related challenges, which can lead to more frequent absences, for a multitude of reasons including being too unwell to attend in-person lessons and requiring regular medical appointments.

Furthermore the intersection of disability and educational environment can create significant challenges that result in heightened mental and physical burdens for students. Tasks that many students may take for granted, such as navigating a physical space or processing information, requires an increased amount of effort and cognitive load, leading to burnout or overwhelm that can affect both physical and mental wellbeing. In consequence, the increased demand on effort and energy may mean that disabled pupils find themselves more frequently absent from school. In cases where a student is not able to understand or verbalise these experiences, it can lead to increased frustrations from both child and adult alike.

Combined these additional mental and physical stresses of disability can result in social and emotional difficulties that may in turn result in school avoidance. These challenges may then be compounded by bullying, lack of peer support, and feelings of exclusion.

Frequent absences lead to gaps in learning and falling behind peers, leading to poorer educational outcomes. Though work may sometimes be provided for students when they are absent, this often relies heavily on the support of parents or carers to complete.

2.8 Disability Rights UK released a report around the often unintentional ableism that is inherent in Attendance Awards in schools as these will, by their very nature, exclude children who are unable to achieve good attendance due to illness or disability. The message of keeping students in the classroom as much as possible being “good” and student absences as “bad” means that students who simply do not have the capacity to be in school full time will automatically be labelled as “bad” or “problem” students, this attitude may come from what the child has internalised as opposed to direct comments from adults around them. Attendance targets in mainstream schools that are a blanket 100% set these students up for failure.

Attendance support is more than just getting children into school. It is important to remember that some students will often struggle to maintain attendance, the report recommends the following:

- Improve support provided to students who are trying to catch up with work at home or in hospital. Attendance should not be synonymous with ability to achieve in school, including attainment, wellbeing and wider development. Ensure that the opportunity to develop is available to students whose disabilities prove a barrier to school attendance.
- When making school guidance on attendance more consistent, ensure that “authorised absence” is not reduced to sickness or hospital appointments. It must consider the full range of legitimate barriers disabled students face regarding school attendance.
- Do not criminalise parents of disabled students because their children cannot access school. Increased and consistent support around attendance needs to mean supporting pupils to access their education in an accessible and safe way – even if that is from home.
- The Equality Act states a legal obligation of reasonable adjustments must be met by schools and local authorities to enable disabled students to have access to their education. Schools should not try to solve the issue of inaccessibility with exclusion, because the latter will never resolve the former.

The most direct way of keeping disabled students in schools in by ensuring efficient and flexible adaptations are available to those who need them. Reasonable adjustments are changes that must be made if someone’s physical or mental disability puts them at a disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled. These are legal requirements under the Equality Act. Examples of reasonable adjustments can be adapting the school uniform policy for students with allergies or sensory needs, allowing students who are sensitive to noise to wear ear defenders as needed, or adjusting snack policies to let students with diabetes or other dietary requirements to eat high calorie or sugary snacks that may not otherwise be available.

2.9 Schools are not legally required to provide reasonable adjustments for children who are not disabled, but a degree of flexibility is recommended, particularly in cases where students are waiting on a diagnosis. For example, the waiting time for an autism diagnosis can exceed 18 months, meaning that a child has shown adequate need for a referral to have taken place, but during that time is not legally entitled to adjustment that will make school an easier place for them to be. It is important not to “gatekeep” reasonable adjustments for students, waiting until a student reaches a point of distress or academic struggle before implementing accommodations is akin to addressing a problem only after it has escalated beyond control. By then a student may already be experiencing significant setbacks in their academic progress and overall wellbeing. Proactive intervention is essential to creating an inclusive and supporting learning environment, implementing accommodations at the earliest signs of need allows for timely support that will prevent the escalation of challenges and reduce the chances of persistent absenteeism from students with needs. The voice and understanding a student has about themselves and their needs, and the voices of their parents and carers, should be listened to. Giving students a voice and involving them in the creation of support services is a key element for positive implementation.

**Recommendation** -Audit Accessibility Plans and generate standards and best practice to which schools must adhere.

**Recommendation** - Support and adaptations should be available to children who require them without the need for an EHCP to be in place, putting the child and parents’ voices at the heart of their support.

**Recommendation** - Ensure that attendance goals and the focus on attendance as recommended by THING is balanced with the Disability Rights UK recommendations on what “Good Attendance” looks like for disabled students.

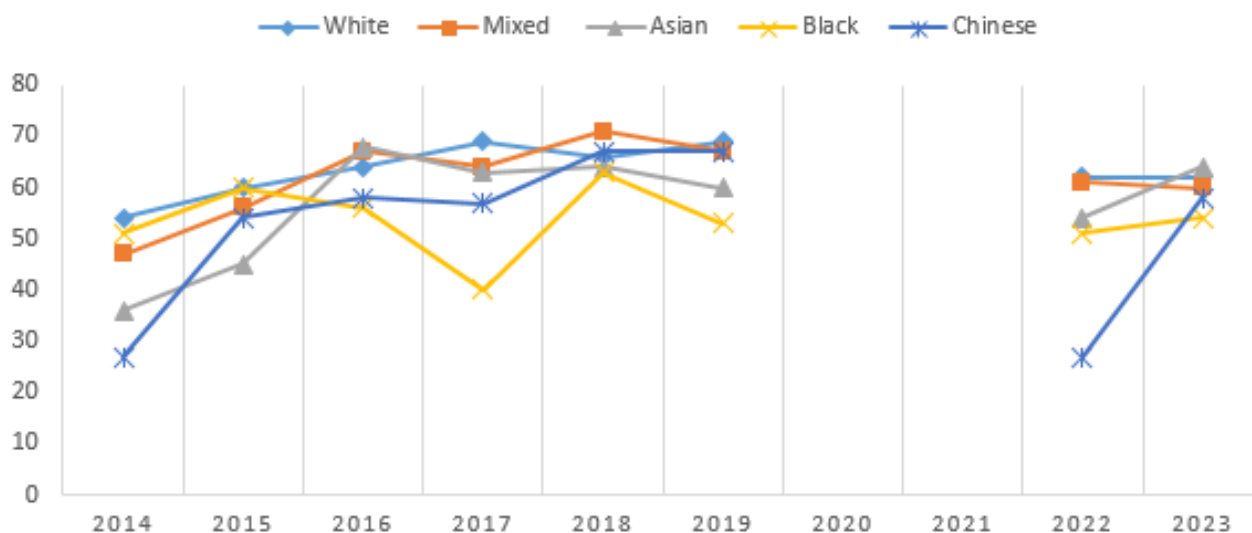
### 3. Attainment and Ethnicity

3.1 Ethnic Inequalities can be seen at all levels of education, both nationally and within Tameside. Tameside is becoming an increasingly diverse borough, our population is 90.9% White, 6.6% Asian, 1.4% Mixed Ethnicity, 0.8% Black/black British, and 0.2% Other Ethnicities. This diversity is reflected in our student body; whilst an overwhelming majority of students are White, around 11.9% are Asian, 3.3% are Black, 6.3% are Mixed Ethnicity, 0.63% are Chinese, and 1.2% are Other Ethnic Groups.

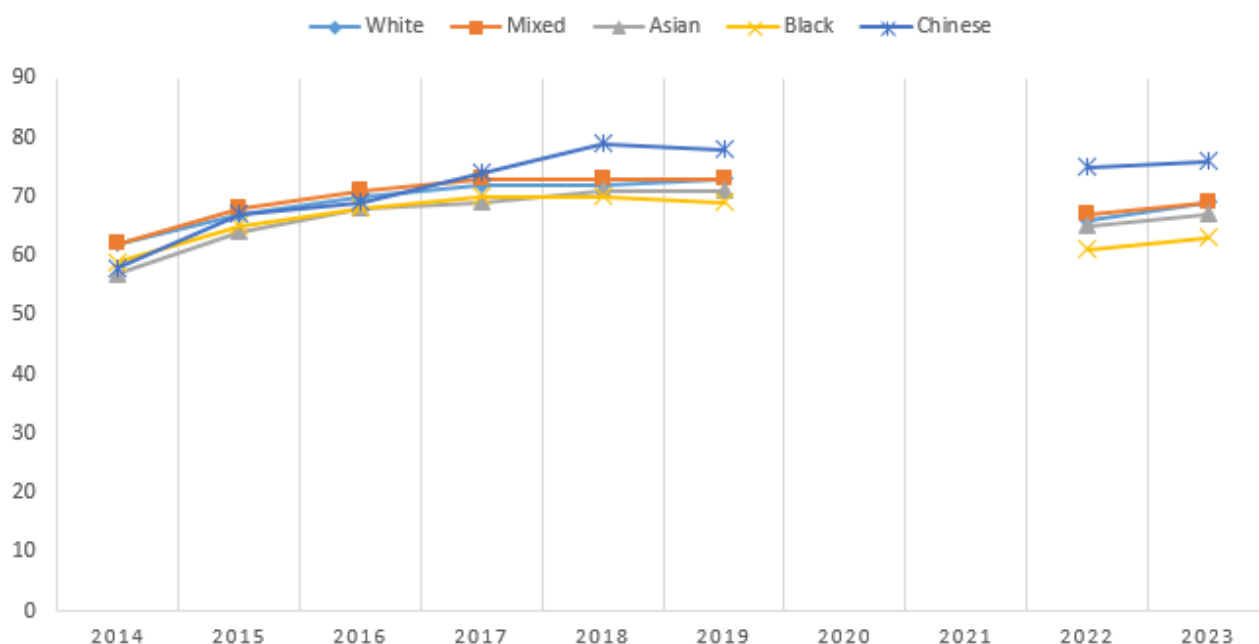
Data from 2014 to 2023 (excluding the pandemic years 2020 and 2021), show that the percentage of children of all ethnicities achieving a good level of development in the Foundation Stage increased from 52.2 in 2014 to 66.0 in 2018, and then stayed within 1% of that number until 2022 where it decreases to 60.1. This, for all years, is below the North West and national numbers, and the scores of the borough's statistical neighbours. However it is worth noting that the decline between 2019 and 2022 for the North West is -7.2%, for our statistical neighbours is -7.0%, and nationally is -6.6%. Tameside's decline -6.8%, which is less of a decline than some of the comparators.

3.2 With some slight variation, all ethnic groups in the chart below show a general trend of growth from 2014 to 2019, and all show decline in 2022 in consequence of the effect of the pandemic on education. The smallest decline between these two years was from Black pupils, who went from 53.0% in 2019 to 50.5% in 2022. However it is worth noting that the national number for this in 2019 was 69.0%, and the North West number 65.0%, these have declined to 60.6% and 54.4% respectively, but whilst these are much greater declines than Tameside's, the starting point was much lower to begin with.

**FOUNDATION STAGE ACHIEVING A GOOD LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT (TAMESIDE)**

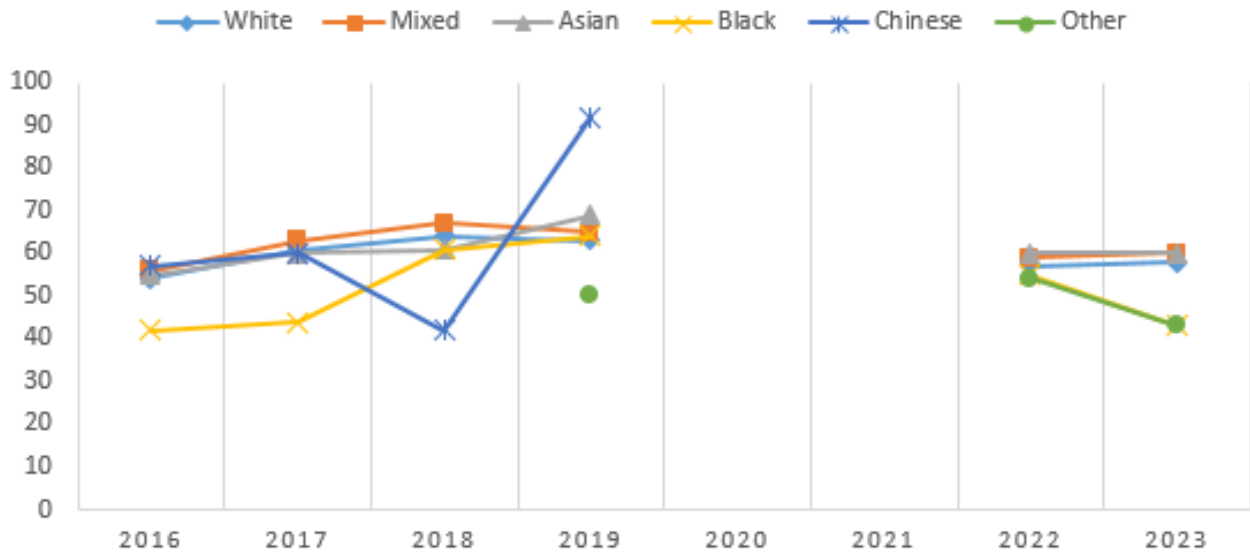


## FOUNDATION STAGE ACHIEVING A GOOD LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT (NATIONAL)

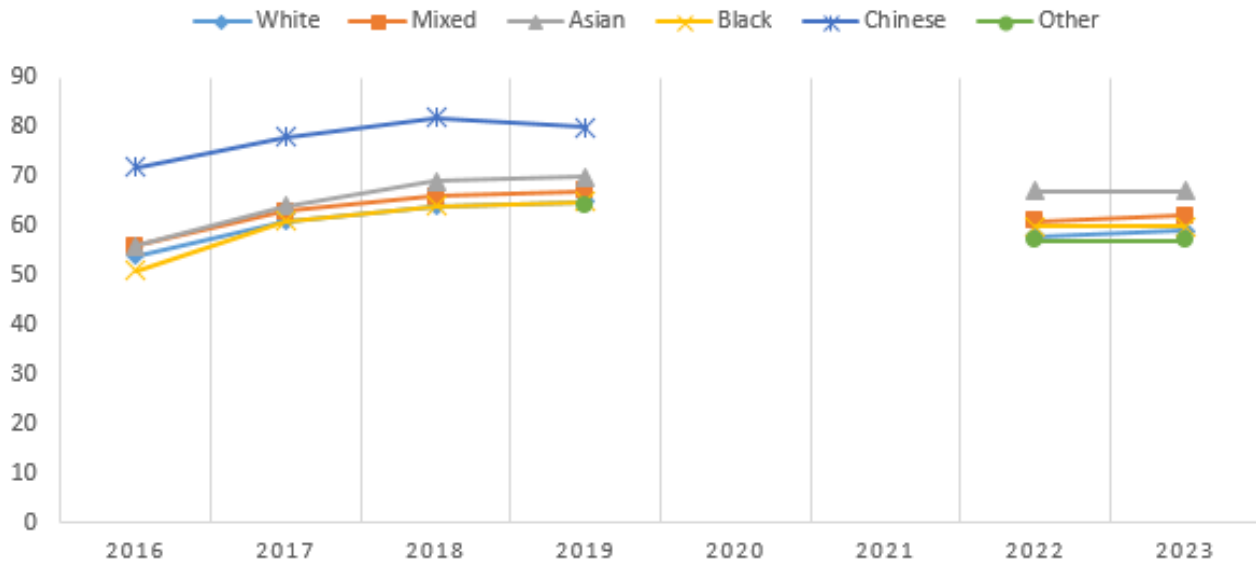


- 3.4 The trends at Key Stage 2 (the level of the year 6 SATS) the percentage of students achieving the expected level in reading, writing, and maths (RWM) are different to the foundation stage in that a slight decline in attainment starts pre-pandemic in 2019, though only a decline of 1% (from 64% to 63%), and even with this slight decrease we are only 2% behind the Northwest and national number of 65%. Our level of decline from 2019 to 2022 is also in line with the decline regionally, nationally, and compared to the borough's statistical neighbours (all within a 6-7% loss). When looking at specific ethnic groups the data reveals that most of the trends are very similar, including similar levels of post-pandemic decline. Black students have achieved the most growth since 2016, and also have also declined to the lowest level post-pandemic. Students belonging to the Chinese ethnic group have by far had the most variation in their results, going from the lowest overall value of 42% in 2018 to the highest overall value of 92% in 2019. Between 2019 and 2022 our Black and Asian cohorts have experienced the biggest decline, both decreasing by 9%, this is a much bigger drop in attainment than can be seen for these students regionally, nationally, and in comparison to our statistical neighbours.

## KS2 ACHIEVING EXPECTED LEVEL IN READING, WRITING, AND MATHS



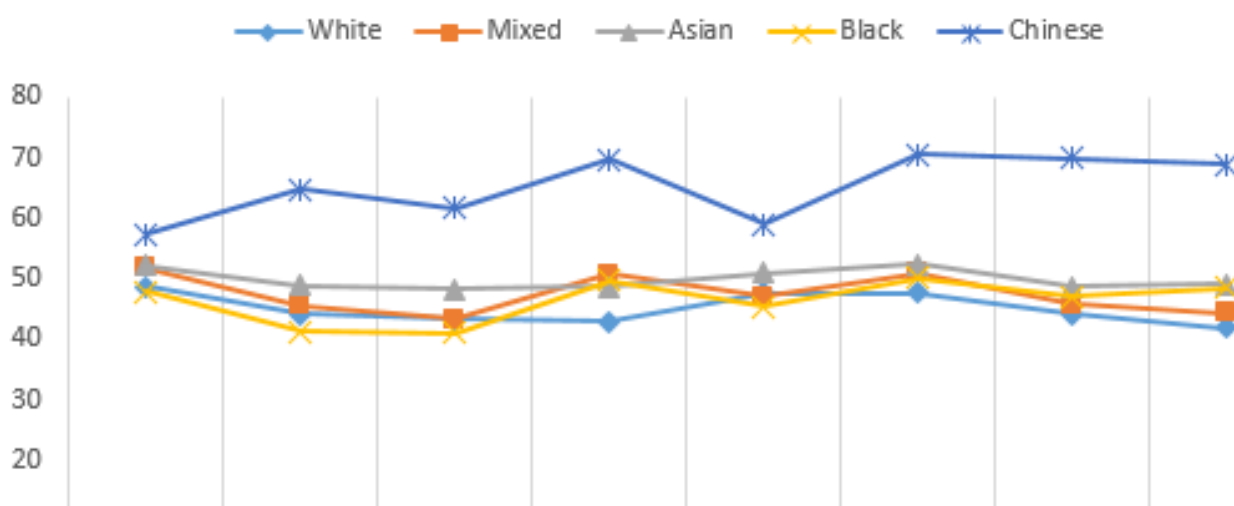
## KS2 ACHIEVING EXPECTED LEVEL IN READING, WRITING, AND MATHS (NATIONAL)



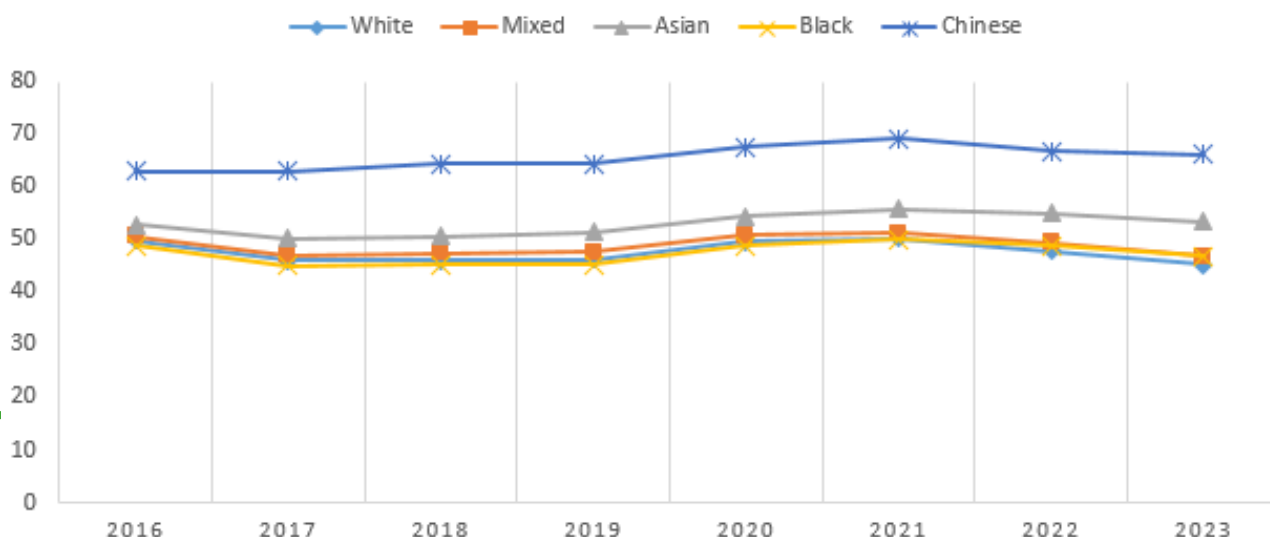
3.5 Attainment 8 is a measure of the average academic performance calculated by adding together pupils' highest scores across eight subjects, including English, maths, and sciences. At GCSE level (KS4) in the 2022/23 school year the national average Attainment 8 score was 44.7 out of 90. Pupils from the Chinese ethnic group had the highest Attainment 8 score out of all ethnic groups at 66.3. On average, nationally, Black pupils and White pupils scored lower than the average score for England. In every ethnic group, girls scored higher than boys and pupils eligible for free school meals had a lower than average score than their non-eligible peers.

In Tameside the average Attainment 8 score is 43.3, a decline of 1.9 from 2022, following the national trend pupils from the Chinese ethnic group scored highest with a score of 68.8 (again, with a decline of 1.1 from 2022), and White pupils scored below this average at 42 (a 2.4 decline from 2022), however breaking from the national trend, Black pupils scored higher than the average with a score of 48.6 (a 1.6 increase from 2022).

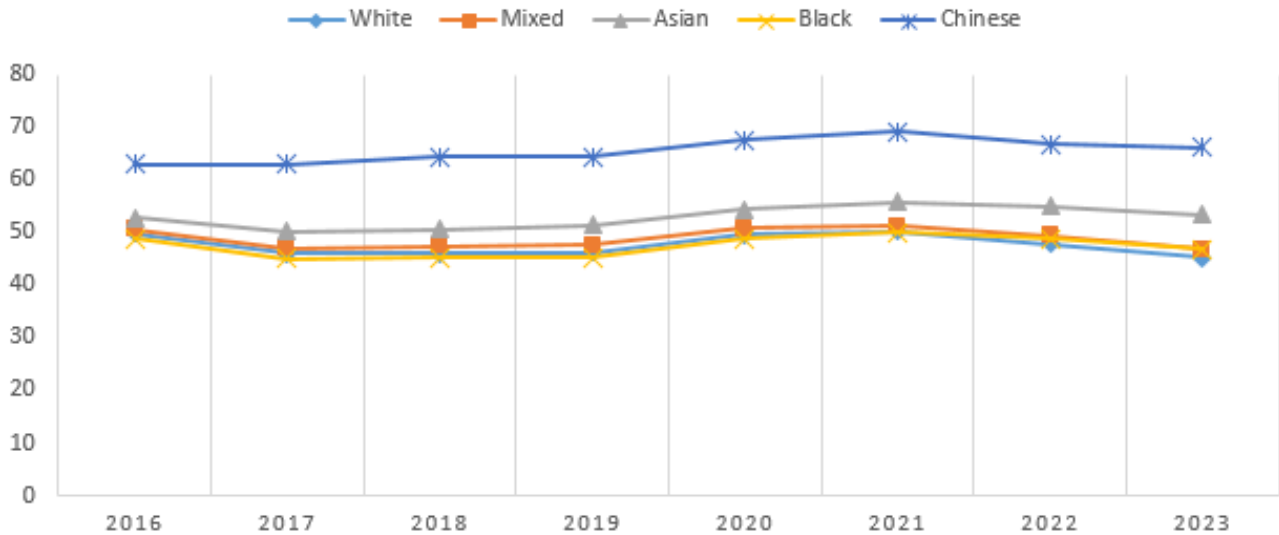
### AVERAGE ATTAINMENT 8 SCORE PER PUPIL



### AVERAGE ATTAINMENT 8 SCORE PER PUPIL (NATIONAL)

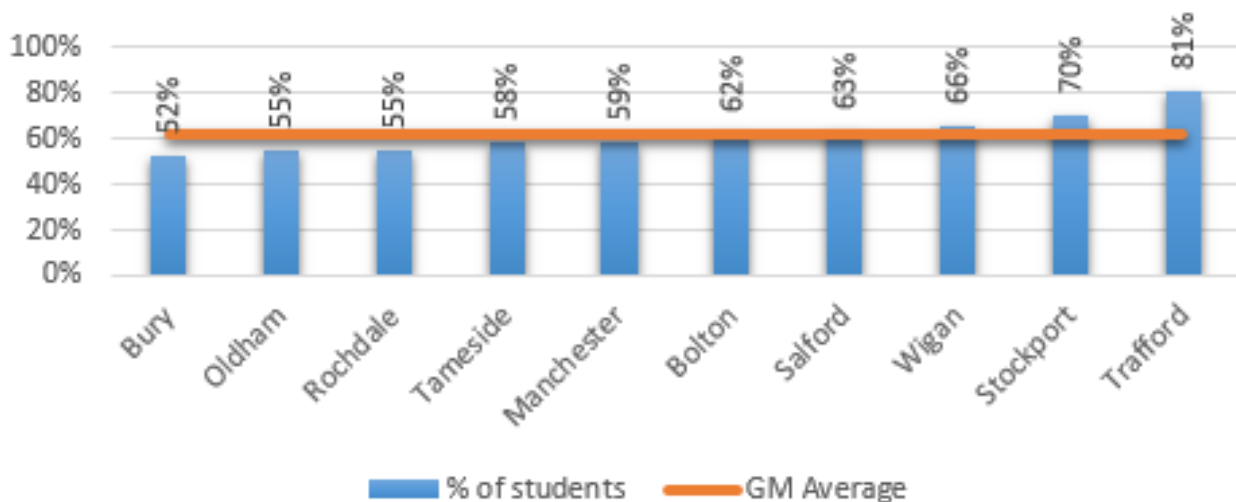


## AVERAGE ATTAINMENT 8 SCORE PER PUPIL (NATIONAL)

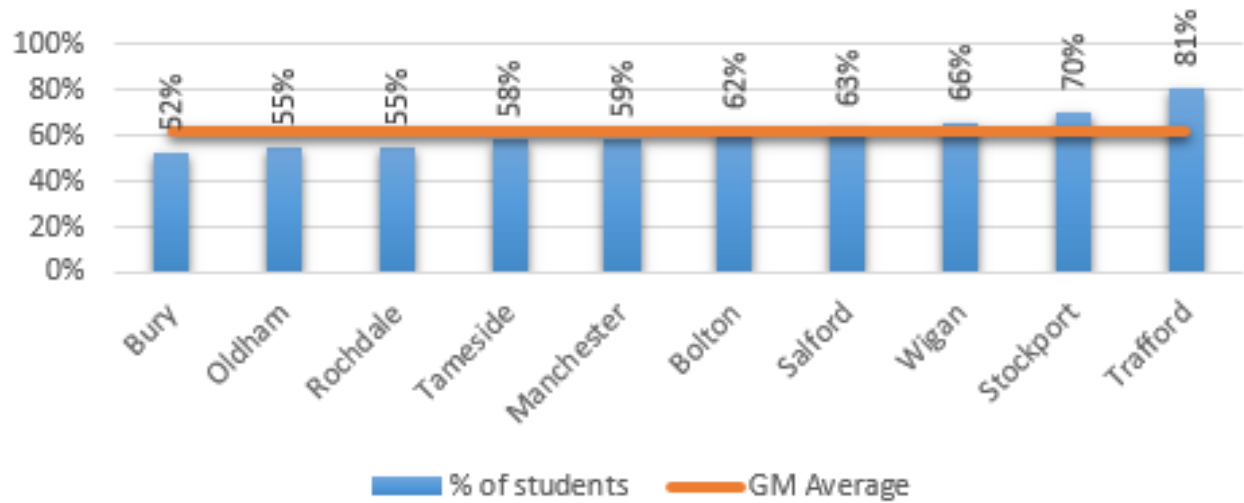


3.6 These differences in attainment can be down to a number of factors, including socio-economic status and those with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Several studies<sup>9,10,11</sup> have found that it takes around five to seven years for bilingual students to become fully competent in English and catch up with their peers. As discussed in the introduction, the impact of covid and loss of face-to-face teaching time and time spent with English speaking peers has impacted the linguistic development of many EAL students. Studies have shown that students who are fully fluent in English perform better than those at the early stages of fluency. This means that EAL students starting school in reception will not have caught up to their peers until Key Stage 2 (year 6) There is therefore a severe attainment penalty for those pupils arriving late into the school system, as a student arriving at Key Stage 3 (year 9) will be unlikely to have achieved a high level of fluency by the time they are sitting their GCSEs.

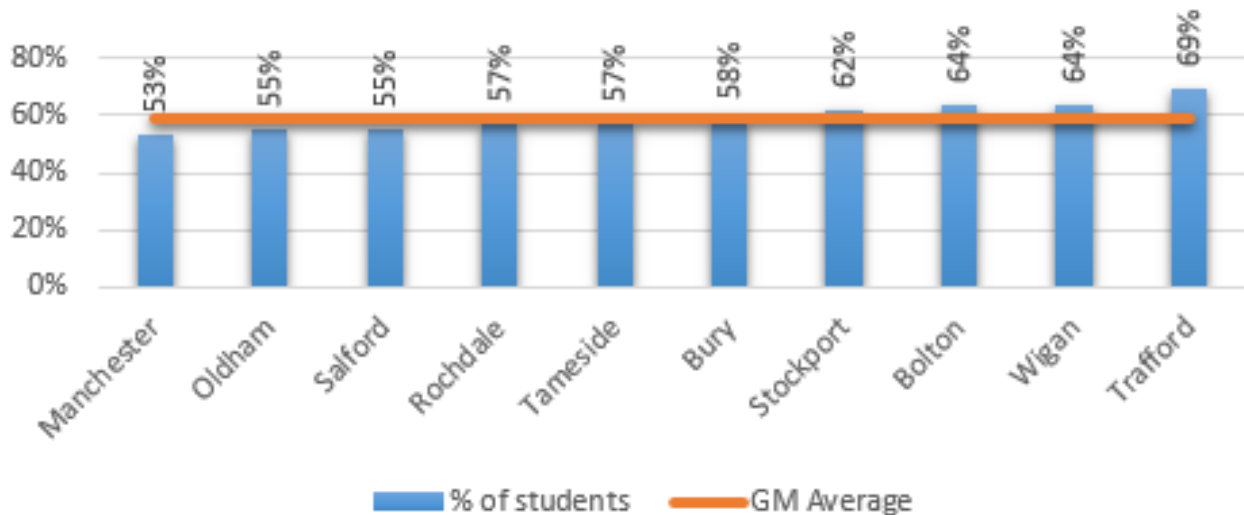
## Proportion of EAL Students achieving the Expected Standard in Reading, Writing and Maths at KS2



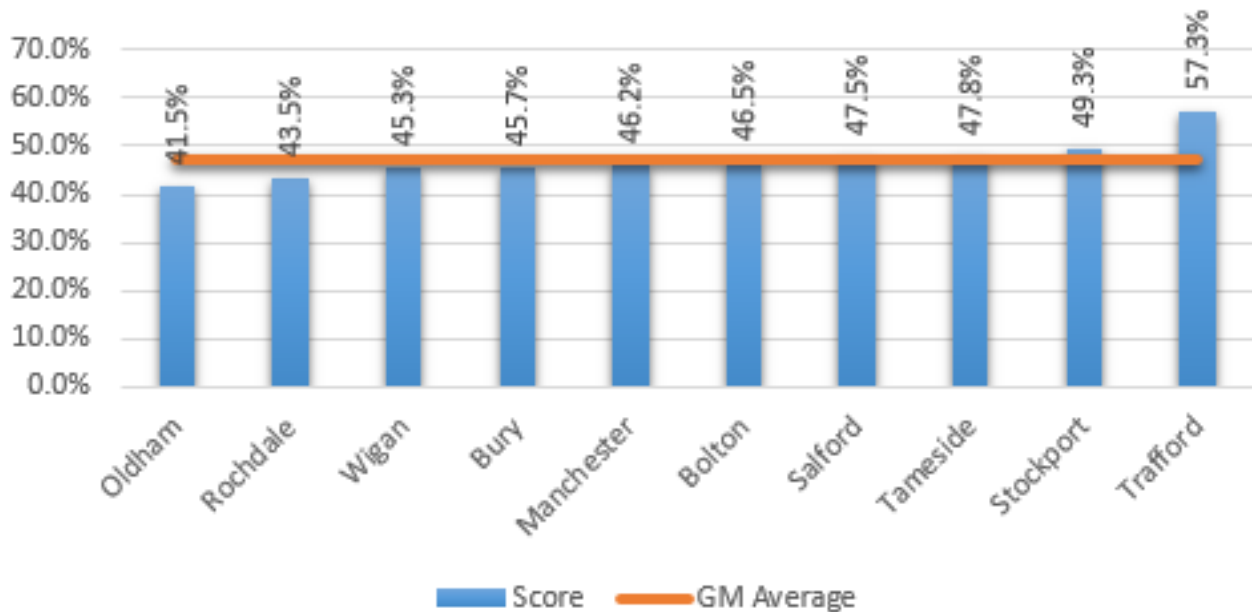
## Proportion of EAL Students achieving the Expected Standard in Reading, Writing and Maths at KS2



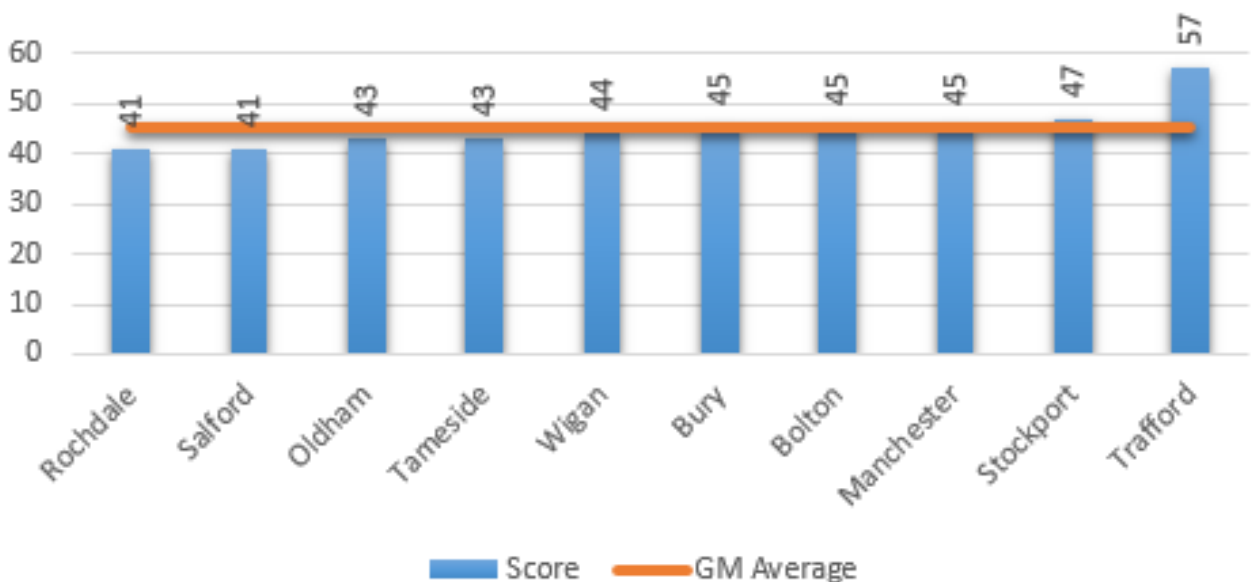
## Proportion of All Students achieving the Expected Standard in Reading, Writing and Maths at KS2



## Average Attainment 8 Score of KS4 EAL Students



## Average Attainment 8 Score of All KS4 Students



57% of all students achieve the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths, showing Tameside's EAL KS2 children to be holding true to the average.

43.3 Average score of all students Attainment 8 in the borough, our EAL students outperforming the average.

3.7 According to a DFE analysis, pre-pandemic the rate of English fluency for pupils who have been in an English school for 1-4 years is half (40%) the fluency of a student who has been in an English school for 5 or more years (805). The pandemic has in effect increased the amount of time it takes to become proficient by nearly two years. The impact that this has on GCSE results are, understandably, more notable in essay-heavy subject matters such as English Language and English Literature than topics such as maths, though there is still an attainment gap. Around 10% of EHCPs in Tameside are for EAL students.

Research demonstrates that the clear link between proficiency in English and pupil's attainment is clear, but also shows that aggregated data can tell us very little in terms of addressing the issue. Schools need to assess and record language proficiency and cognitive skills in order to provide targeted support strategies tailored to the individual pupil. It is also important to recognise that bilingualism has positive associations with attainment, if the student receives the necessary support to reach proficiency their bilingualism is an asset and will improve their chances of success.

3.8 The intersect of gender and ethnicity can also shape educational outcomes, reflecting broader social biases and systemic inequalities. Differing gender norms across cultures can dictate expectations and opportunities. For instance the perceived value of education for men over education for women. This disparity can be seen nationally where Pakistani girls tend to achieve lower grades than White girls and Pakistani boys. The impact of unconscious racial bias cannot be overlooked, black boys in particular have historically been subject to pre-emptive discipline, which can result in higher rates of suspension and expulsion.<sup>12</sup> School exclusion disproportionately affects Black children and families.<sup>13</sup> Nationally Black Caribbean children are educated in pupil referral units (PRUs) at nearly four times (3.9) the rate based on the national pupil population.<sup>14</sup>

However these disparities are not immutable. A 2014 study revealed a significant shift in gender gaps where male education is valued more highly than female education in countries of origin, this has largely reversed by the second generation. The study in question<sup>15</sup> focused largely on Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls, so may not be fully representative, though it holds particular relevance for this borough given our significant Bangladeshi population.

- 3.9 The *Immigrant Paradigm* is a theory that suggests recent immigrants devote themselves more to education than the native population as education is seen as the way out of poverty. There is a distinction between what are termed “voluntary minorities”, such as immigrant groups who may be recent arrivals to the country and may have very high educational aspirations; and “involuntary minorities” such as white working class pupils in England, who hold less optimistic views around social mobility. This paradigm can often be seen in conversations around so-called “Tiger Parenting”, which is a complex and often controversial topic typically associated with the ESEA community. It is deeply rooted in the mindset that education and work ethic are the key to social mobility, though it has been criticised for placing academic success over student wellbeing. Studies show that despite similar levels of deprivation and socio-economic backgrounds, third generation UK born minorities will do comparatively worse than first generation born or students born outside of the UK. This suggests that those minorities long established in the country, particularly in a disadvantaged context, may be the least likely to be optimistic about the transformative power of education.
- 3.10 Mentoring programmes have been demonstrated to have a positive effect on the success of ethnic minority students.

The Black Caribbean Achievement Project (BCAP) was a mentoring project targeted at ethnic minority students between 8-16 who were at risk of academic underachievement or exclusion, the project provided target individual academic support, group projects, and outreach work with parents and local communities to improve self-esteem, manage emotions and workload, and achieve highly in the classroom. Mentored pupils saw improvements in test scores and spelling age, as well as increased self-esteem, motivation, an ambition for their future careers. Parents and teachers also recognised the positive impact of the project on behaviour and academic success. BCAP acted as a liaison between schools, parents, and the community, working towards preventing expulsion and advocating for pupils, celebrating success and encouraging mentees to self-evaluate.

The Somali Raising Achievement Project RAPS was a similar programme of target work in Lambeth council that increased the number of Somali pupils achieving high marks on their GCSEs and improved parental awareness and teacher expectations. Putting robust support systems in places including counsellors and learning mentors, as well as having an EAL teacher conducting robust assessments and working closely with English departments to focus on students’ written English.

Both these projects demonstrate the positive effects of mentoring students, and the importance of building relationships with parents and the wider community.

**Recommendation** - Collect more accurate and specific data on language proficiency to better inform targeted support.

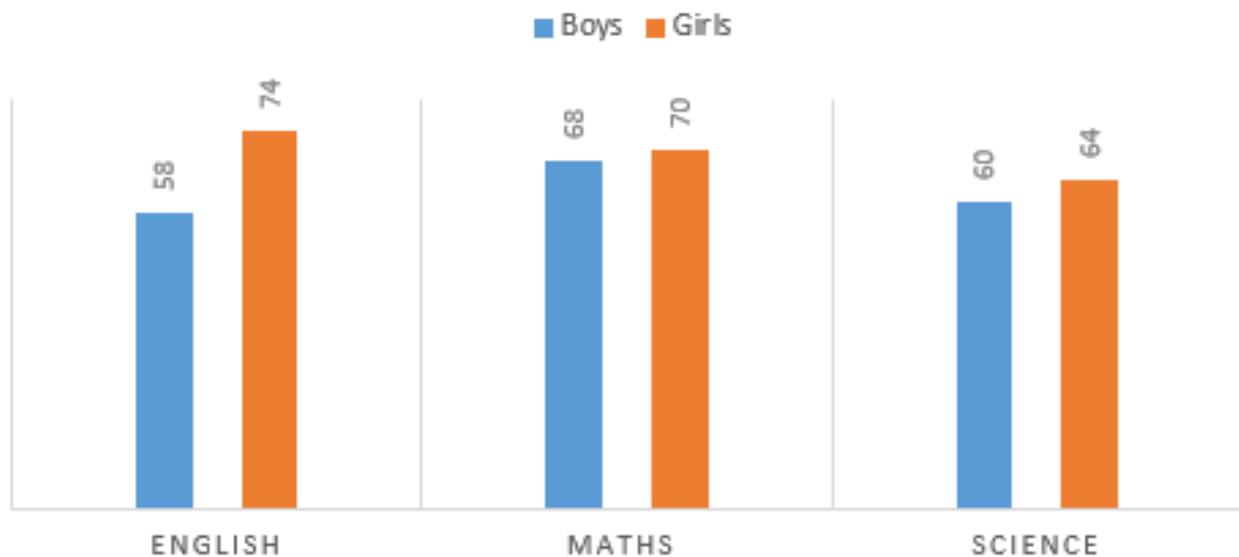
**Recommendation** - Racial Bias training, particularly around pre-emptive punishment.

**Recommendation** - Foster relationships with local communities with the goal to develop mentoring programmes

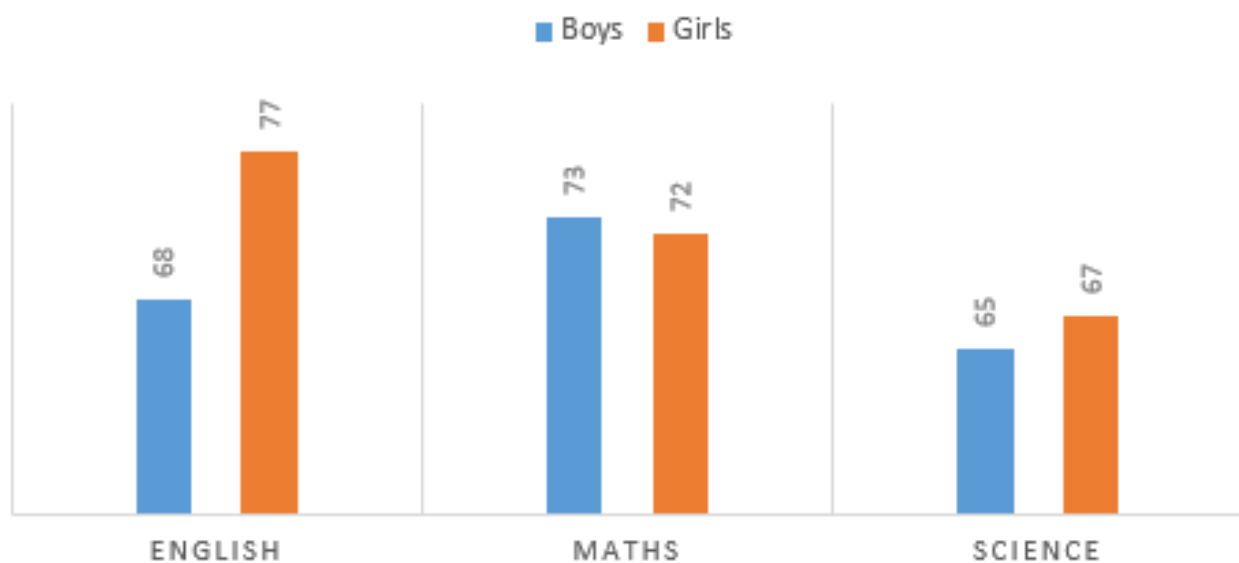
## 4. Attainment and Gender

- 4.1 There is a clear gender gap in GCSE results both nationally and in Tameside, in Tameside male students achieve on average lower grades at GCSE than female students. (9 – 4 is the equivalent to the previous A\*-C, and are passing grades)

### PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ACHIEVING 9 - 4 AT GCSE



### PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ACHIEVING 9 - 4 (NATIONAL)



- 4.2 It is a well-documented fact that the differences in attainment at GCSE level are not reflected in Higher Education, for example despite outperforming boys in the sciences, female students are underrepresented at the HE Level.

The gender difference in subject-taking is important because the courses where women are underrepresented have some of the highest returns, meaning that the subject of study and gender representation therein contributes to the gender pay gap.

- 4.3 The gender gap is consistent and persistent over time, moreover the difference in attainment and reading and writing remains much wider in reading and writing than in maths.
- 4.4 There is little recent research into the attainment gap between male and female students, and arguments on the sides of both nature and nurture. A Norwegian study from 2021 found that students who reach puberty earlier tend to perform better academically, and that this held true for both male and female students, as typically girls reach puberty before boys, this could be an explanation as to why the attainment gap exists, and why it has not closed. Similarly research exists that argues that the socialisation of boys and girls informs different educational outcomes. From perceptions of masculinity and what, in terms of academia, is deemed as worth trying for and ideas of “feminine” academic subjects (i.e. literature and poetry, compared to sciences and sports). Similarly how boys are more likely to be disciplined or pre-emptively disciplined as they are perceived as being more rowdy. There are also, as previously discussed, cultural factors and socio-economic factors that may inform the differences between academic attainment between male and female students. Part of the issue when looking at gender equality and attainment is that much of the data is focused around gender parity, which is made up of the ratio of boys to girls or women to men in a given aspect of education (i.e. attainment, attendance, etc.). A critical view would argue that this is inadequate and the approach must be much more complex, working with communities and their approaches to institutions and relationships therein. The AGEE (Accountability for Gender Equality and Education) Framework argues for the use of the capability approach when looking at attainment analysis.
- 4.5 Despite the considerations of biology, it would be unfair to suggest that there is nothing to be done about the attainment gap between boys and girls. Given that students are already considering A-Level and Higher Education at the point of choosing their GSCEs at the end of KS3 (Year 9), interventions to encourage female students in careers in STEM must begin before this point.

The gap in attainment is lower in Tameside than nationally, particularly in English. (Post-lockdown reading attainment at KS2 also improved by twice the national average), demonstrating this as a strength within Tameside’s education system.

**Recommendation** – Interventions to encourage long-term study of STEM or high return subjects targeted at female students to happen before the close of Key Stage 3.

## 5. Attainment and LGBTQ+ Students

- 5.1 The data around LGBTQ+ students and educational attainment is largely non-existent. We do not track attainment by this metric, and it would likely be impossible to do so due to the complex nature of self-discovery and coming out. Many students may be hesitant to share their sexual orientation or gender identity with schools either due to not being ready in themselves, or fear of discrimination or stigma. This understandable reluctance to disclose such personal information, let alone the nuanced journey often involved in arriving at a particular label, can make it impossible for educational institutions to accurately track the experiences and outcomes of LGBTQ+ students. This in turn can make it difficult to implement effective and measurable policies and support systems aimed at improving the educational journey.
- 5.2 Whilst directly collecting data on LGBTQ+ students' educational attainment may be challenging, we can examine broader evidence that shows how homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying (HBT bullying) can significantly impact the school experience. Research suggests that such bullying can lead to poor attendance, decreased engagement, and increased mental distress amongst LGBTQ+ students, ultimately affecting their overall educational attainment. By addressing the issue of bullying and creating supportive and inclusive school environments, we can work towards improving the educational outcomes for these students.

The national LGBT survey asked respondents about their experiences in education and how open they were about their LGBT status; a significant number of respondents had experienced a negative incident during their time in education, with many people having been outed without their consent, which is well documented as being a harmful and traumatising experience. Over a fifth (21%) of respondents to the survey had experienced a negative reaction involving someone disclosing their LGBTQ+ identity without their permission, 83% of the most serious incidents experienced by respondents within educational institutions were not reported because they “happen all the time”. HBT language and bullying was prevalent in all surveyed schools, with 42% of years five and six students and 54% of secondary schools students reporting HBT language to be common at their school.

- 5.3 Though studies have found that young people are more accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals compared to older generations, bullying and discrimination still occur in schools, with particular risk for transgender students. Bullying has negative effects on attendance, academic performance, mental health, and increases the risk of suicidal behaviour among LGBTQ+ youth. A survey conducted jointly with Stonewall and UCAS of HE students found that LGBTQ+ students are more likely to declare a disability than their non-LGBTQ+ peers (30% vs 12%), mental health conditions in particular (13% vs 2.9%). This same survey also found that transgender students tend to have lower academic achievements and face higher rates of bullying.

The government recently axed their HBT bullying programme, which resulted in concerned statements from a number of LGBTQ+ charities who were aware that without the additional funding the government had been provided, schools would have to prioritise already stretched budgets and their willingness to spend on this particular issue would be eclipsed by other needs. The well-documented rise of transphobic rhetoric, alongside the government removing their financial support for anti-HBT bullying programmes, could send a worrying message to Queer youth about their safety and acceptance in schools.

- 5.4 The lack of consistent national guidelines has led, nationally, to varying levels of education regarding LGBTQ+ issues and identities, despite increased education in this area being associated with less bullying and safer environments for LGBTQ+ students. It is valuable to have consistent policies regarding LGBTQ+ education and bullying to ensure incidents are addressed quickly. This includes staff training, as a report by Diversity Role Models<sup>16</sup> highlighted the fact that many staff members wanted to play a bigger role in tackling bullying, but felt ill-equipped to do so. Data from their survey the confidence of school staff in addressing biphobic or homophobic language after receiving inclusion training increased from 60% to 90%, and for transphobic language from 40% to 93%. 89% of staff trained by Stonewall agreed or strongly agreed that they would *feel able to deliver training on how to tackle homophobic or biphobic bullying* to other members of staff at their school, compared to only 10% before the training.

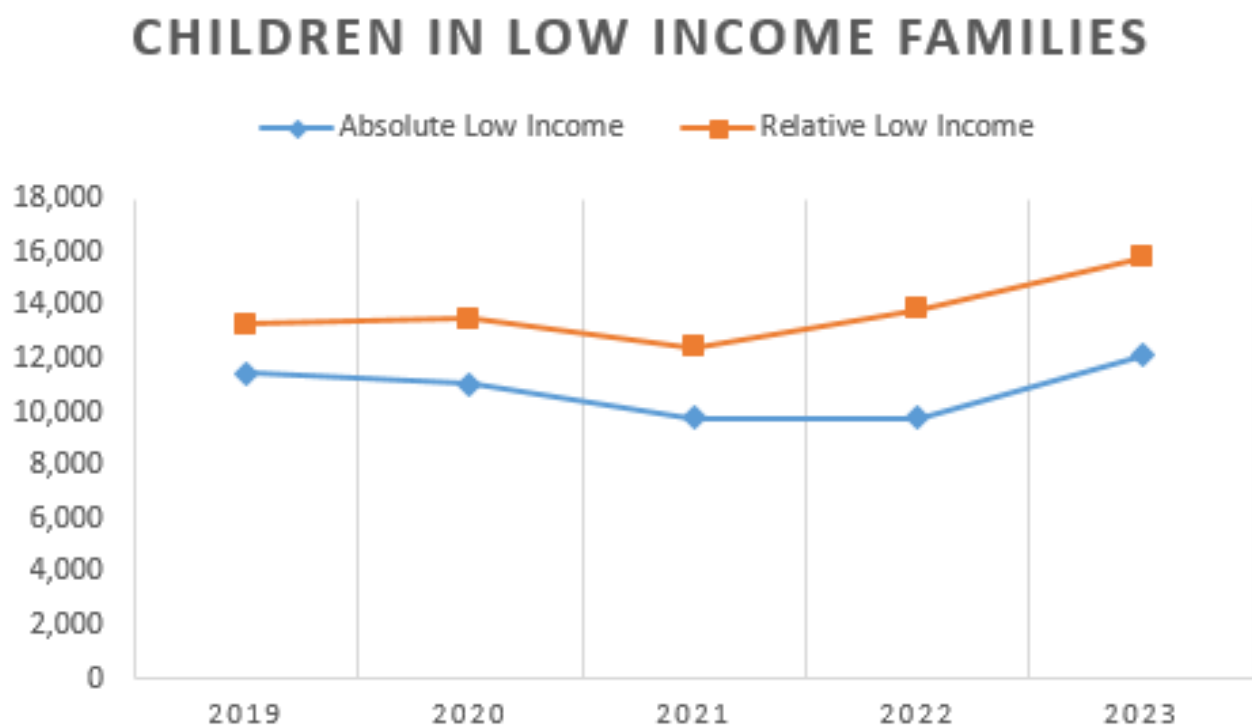
**Recommendation** – invest in training key members of staff to empower them to effectively deal with HBT bullying.

## 6. Attainment and Socio-Economic Status

- 6.1 Children from disadvantaged households tend to do worse at every stage of school. This gap in attainment nationally has remained largely consistent for over a decade, with little to no sign of closing.

There is a strong relationship between family background and educational attainment. More than half of children who grew up in the most deprived households hold qualifications of up to GCSE level or below, whereas almost half of those from more affluent families go on to graduate from university.

In Tameside the number of children in low income families is as follows:



- 6.2 Whilst the impact of covid and the subsequent cost of living crisis has had a significant impact on household incomes and socio-economic status, a survey by the Institute of Fiscal Studies released in 2022<sup>17</sup> found that whilst there were no immediate significant differences between children who did and did not have a parent lose their job, children whose parents had been furloughed were significantly more likely to experience a worsening in their socio-emotional skills than those whose parents had not been furloughed (51% versus 45%). The worsening of socio-emotional skills happened regardless of the level of income in the household, suggesting that the economic status of a household had, in this regard, less of an impact on a child's wellbeing than the level of economic security.

- 6.3 This is important to note as though economic deprivation is an important factor to consider whilst considering children's attainment, economic uncertainty within households has had a much greater impact on children's ability to learn than has perhaps been typically considered when addressing attainment inequality and socio-economic status. With the current cost-of-living crises, economic uncertainty in households with children is going to be an increasing factor and will continue to impact socio-emotional skills. While furloughed workers received up to 80% of their typical earnings, a single parent with two children would on average lose half of their household net income if they lost their job, and a couple each earning the average wage would lose 40% of household income if one parent lose their job.

Economic uncertainty and the risk of job-loss naturally had an impact on parental wellbeing, the pandemic has also had a significant and well-documented impact on mental health and wellbeing, the mental health crisis of the last few years being forced almost to breaking point since March 2020. Children were not immune from the mental health impacts of the upheaval of the last half decade (covid-19, race riots, cost-of-living crisis, international wars), but it is worth mentioning the impact of parental adversities on their children, as it is vital to understand that the knock on effect of these will reflect in a child's attainment.

- 6.4 A Lancet article in 2022<sup>18</sup> documented in detail the impact of poverty and family adversity on adolescent health; children exposed to poverty and family adversities such as parental mental ill health may experience poor outcomes across the life course. The report suggests that the issues are two sides of the same coin, and interventions to address specific adversities such as parental mental health problems may not be meaningful or effective if childhood socio-economic conditions such as poverty are not considered.

Where poverty and parental mental ill health intersect you get worse outcomes for the children involved, particularly when it comes to socio-emotional behavioural and cognitive problems, obesity, and drug (though not alcohol) experimentation. The paper reports that approximately one in four children in the UK live with a parent affected by mental health problems, though it is likely that this has increased. Recent reports have shown that 4.3 million children in the UK (one third) are living in poverty. In Tameside, as shown above, we know that there is a significant portion of children living in poverty. The Trussell Trust distributed 2264 Food Parcels to families with children in Tameside in 2023. Co-occurrences of persistent poverty and poor parental mental health was more common amongst children of those with no educational qualifications. Persistent poverty or poor parental mental health are associated with a doubling of the odds of poor child mental and physical health. Children exposed to both have over six times the odds of mental health problems compared to children in low-adversity groups.

Much of the post-pandemic focus on children's academic skills has understandably been on catching up on "lost learning", the risk being that not prioritising socio-emotional development will mean that the recovery of lost time learning face-to-face, will be at a disadvantage as the two factors are symbiotic in nature.

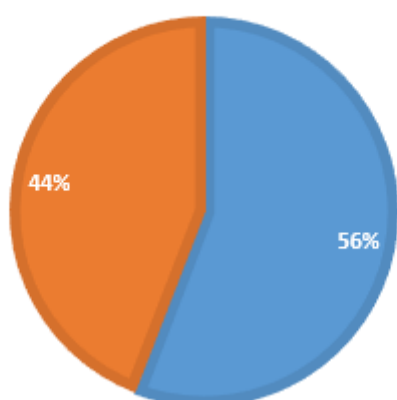
6.5 The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) research looks at the minimum cost of primary and secondary school education to households with children in the UK, since it began in the UK in 2008. It set out what the public thinks is needed for a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in urban UK, including what primary and secondary students need and need to be able to do to have this dignified standard of living. Households with children have seen the cost of minimum socially acceptable standard of living increase by an average of 18% in the last year, which is the largest increase in a single year since the research first began sixteen years ago. The impact of this increase is likely more substantive than this number would originally suggest (though an increase in cost of 20% is substantive enough) as the MIS research looks at the cost of things spread out over a longer period, for example, the cost of residential trips is spread out over the seven years of primary school. The reality for households will likely be that this substantial costs will be met all at once, finding £250 to cover the cost of residential, rather than setting aside £1.03 each week.

Education is an important part of a dignified standard of living for families with children. It is important to consider what school life should be like for a child, including school trips and events outside of general classes, having access to the internet, having laptops/computers on which students can complete their work, etc. and to ensure that these are accessible and within budgets for families. The pandemic has shown us very clearly the need for access to technology and the internet in order to fully participate in school and society. The total cost for meeting needs around education are estimated to over £6,000 in primary school and £12,291 in secondary. The median full-time salary for Tameside residents is £27,498.

6.6 In official statistics the poverty attainment gap is measured as the difference between the attainment of the majority of pupils and those eligible for free school meals (FSM). This is problematic because the gap changes as the proportion of pupils eligible for FSMs changes over time. Individual students' circumstances may change as their family income changes, but more importantly different groups of students may have more or fewer pupils eligible for FSMs due to fluctuations in the economy and changes in government policy. This then affects the attainment gap, but it is nothing to do with education and does not accurately reflect the work of schools. If, nationally, data is only taken from students who have been eligible for FSMs for the duration of their education, indicating that they are in worse poverty than those who are on the cusp of eligibility there has nationally been a steady decrease in attainment (with fluctuation around the lockdown years). Despite the progress however, the gap between the permanently disadvantaged students and the rest is still substantial.

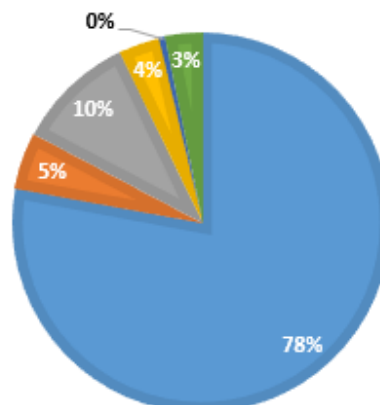
**EHCPS BY FSM ELIGIBILITY**

■ Not Eligible for FSM ■ Eligible for FSM



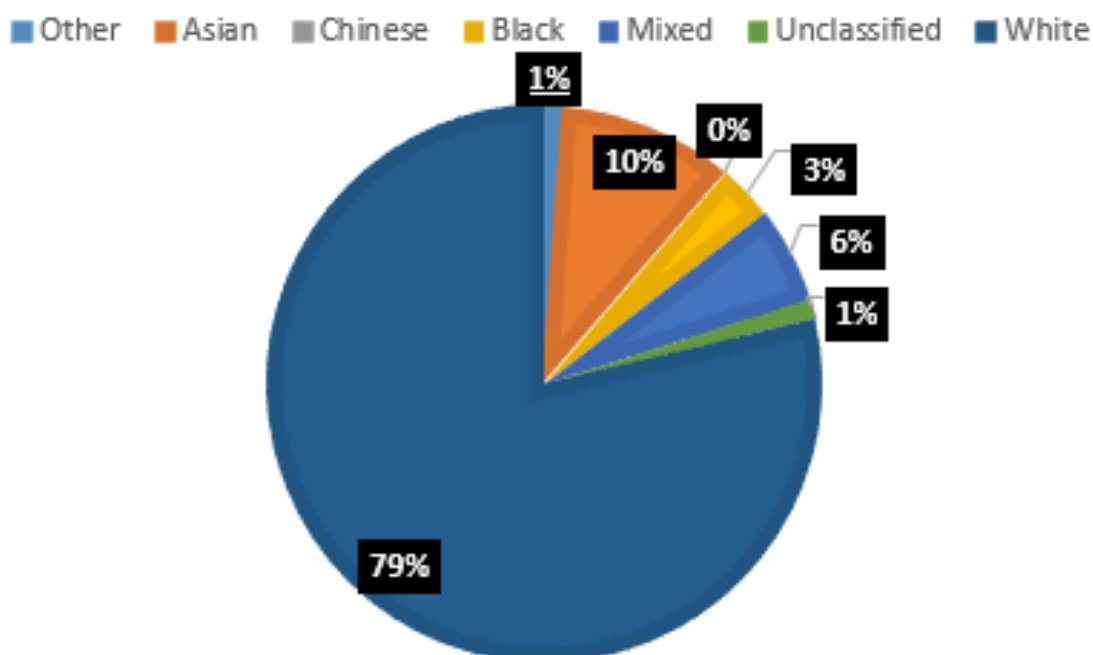
**EHCPS BY ETHNICITY**

■ White ■ Mixed ■ Asian ■ Black ■ Chinese ■ Other



- 6.7 One of the main drivers of this change is the reduction in social segregation, the extent to which poorer children are clustered in schools with others like them. Tameside has a uniquely low Moran's Index, meaning that the geography of economically deprived residents is spread fairly evenly throughout the borough, and this element of social segregation is much lower than schools in other boroughs. Reinforcing the ongoing reduction in segregation should be a strong educational priority in a bid to further reduce the gap. A bold but difficult way to reduce this social segregation is to reduce the variety of schools, and the quality and standards therein. School catchment areas are another factor increasing social segregation. Where schools are oversubscribed, contested places should not be allocated on the basis of travel or of feeder primary schools alone. These methods all duplicate and reinforce residential segregation by poverty. Alternative methods could include banding by poverty, where each school might be required to give a certain number of places to pupils eligible for FSMs, or lotteries where places are allocated randomly. The fundamental idea behind any changes to address social segregation is to spread out the most disadvantaged students in order to make any issues with their attainment easier to address.
- 6.8 Focusing on FSM data, in Tameside there are around 9,200 students eligible for free school meals. This is around a quarter of all students. 26% of primary school students are eligible, and 22% of secondary school students. Nationally, around 2.1 million pupils are eligible for free school meals, 24.6%. 24.3% of primary students and 24.1% of secondary.

## FREE SCHOOL MEALS BY ETHNICITY



Only 57% of children who are eligible for FSM are assessed as having good levels of development in meeting early learning goals at age five; this is compared to 74% of children from more affluent households. These inequalities persist throughout their educational careers and the gap generally does not close through to GCSE level. This gap translates into differences into their qualifications as adults, as seen below, which then impacts the earning potential.

National statistics show that at 25 years old, 23.0% of FSM recipients who attended school in England had recorded earnings above the annualised full-time equivalent of the living wage in comparison with 43.5% of those that did not receive or qualify for Free School Meals. 18.2% of females who received FSM had recorded earnings above the Living Wage compared with 27.8% of males who received FSM; for non-recipients, the proportion was 39.3% and 47.5% respectively. The difference in the percentage of FSM recipients and non-recipients earning above the Living Wage was broadly similar in all regions, at around 20%.

- 6.9 The benefits of hot school dinners are well-documented, reducing food insecurity, improving dietary intake, positively impacting health and obesity rates, and better meeting children's nutritional needs and leading to a better learning environment.

Children require essential nutrients from food to support their brain growth, the supply of these nutrients affects the adult the child will become. Children not eating a healthy diet will not perform as well at school as those who are well nourished. They are more likely to suffer from mental health problems such as stress, and as they age they will be more likely to suffer from diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease and obesity. By providing students with free school meals, they are guaranteed at least one hot meal a day that helps to meet these requirements.

- 6.10 While around 40% of young people who just miss out on free school meals achieve good GCSEs nationally, that rises to 70% of sixteen year olds in the richest third of families. The share of pupils leaving primary school meeting literacy and numeracy benchmarks fell from 65% in 2018-19 to 59% in 21-22. Children from more disadvantage backgrounds may have fallen twice as far behind as the average child, in part due to worse experience with home learning.

On average pupils eligible for free school meals achieve lower GCSE attainment than other pupils. In 2022, only 47% of pupils eligible for FSM achieved a standard pass in both English and Maths GCSEs compared to 75% of pupils not eligible. In Greater Manchester specifically 29% of FSM students achieve a pass in English and maths compared to 54% of non-eligible FSM students. In 2022 only 29% of FSM pupils achieved grade five or above compared to 57% of non-FSM pupils. This means that non-FSM pupils from higher income households are twice as likely to pass both English and maths compared to FSM pupils from lower incomes households.

6.11 It is always worth noting when discussing the impact of poverty on children, young people, and their families, that we can only realistically measure poverty through looking at household income, and at no point is financial abuse taken into account. This means that there are households where the total income is above any poverty measure and means they will not register as eligible for benefits and/or FSMs; but members of that household will functionally be living in similar circumstances to households in absolute poverty. This example of hidden poverty is almost impossible to measure and therefore increasingly difficult to address, but an example of how there is likely more poverty than we can be aware of through the data, and also a consideration when considering who support would be available to and which students should be excluded.

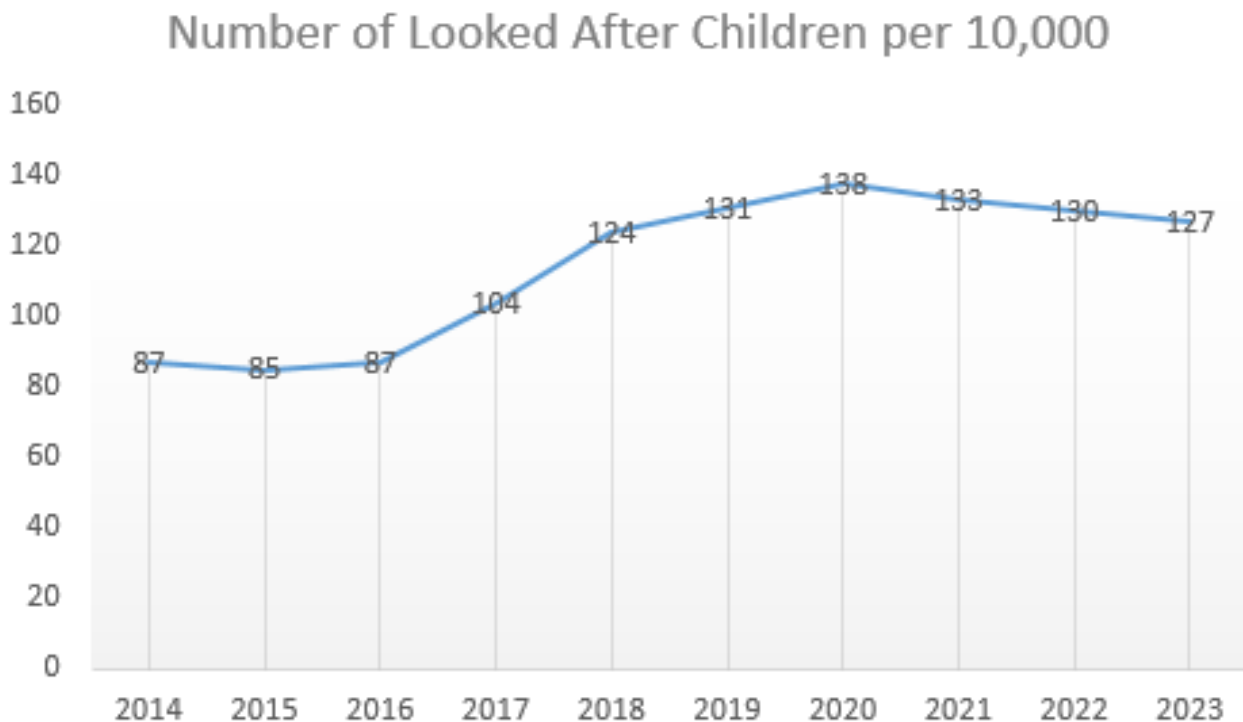
**Recommendation** - Programmes to focus on the socio-emotional development of students

**Recommendation** - Schools to explore flexible payment options or alternative models for families to allow more equal access to school events (i.e. school proms)

**Recommendation** - Support the running of programmes such as Breakfast clubs and ensure adequate funding

## 7. Attainment and Looked After Children

- 7.1 127 per 10,000 children in Tameside are Looked After Children, which equates to around 656 Children (November 2023)



- 7.2 At KS2 48% of LAC pupils in the borough are reaching the expected standard in reading compared to 72% of students overall; 36% are achieving the expected standard in writing compared to 69% overall, and 42% the expected standard in maths, compared to 73% overall. This compares favourably to our statistical neighbours and the northwest overall.

By the time we get to KS4 the Attainment 8 scores become comparably less favourable, charting consistently lower than north west, England, and our statistical neighbours. The average attainment 8 score for LAC in the borough is 17.9 (for the northwest it's 20.7), compared to overall attainment 8 scores this falls well short of the 45.2 that students average in the borough. The percentage of LAC students achieving a 9-4 (current A\* -C equivalent) pass in English and Maths is in line with the north west at 22.2% (the northwest being at 22.6% and our statistical neighbours at 21.86%). Overall students achieving a 9-4 pass in English and maths is 61.3%.

- 7.3 Our exclusion rate of LAC students is fairly high in comparison with the northwest, 11.05% of our LAC students having at least one fixed term exclusion from school (nw:9.25%), and the percentage of unauthorised absence is 4.8, more than double the England number of 2.3% and only slightly less than double the north west number at 2.6%. 19.22% of our looked after children are classed as persistent absentees.
- 7.4 Looked After Children are almost four times more likely to have a special educational need than all children and are almost nine times more likely to have an education, health, and care (EHC) plan than the average of all children. For those on EHCPs and then with SEND support, social, emotional and mental health is the most common primary type of special educational need.

Looked After Children with an EHCP scored on average 6.9 Attainment 8 compared to 13.0 for non-looked after children with EHCPs.

Looked After Children progress less well than non-looked after children with the largest difference in attainment being in writing and maths. However, LAC who have either no identified SEN or receive SEN support typically progress as well or better than non-looked after children or children in need across all subjects.

- 7.5 Children in care have consistently lower educational attainment than peers who live with their birth families. However, metrics often define “education” narrowly, focusing on traditional in-school achievements with which this population typically struggles. A paper published in March 2023<sup>19</sup> interviewed current and former children in care and discovered that they perceive education in a much broader way covering a wider range of their experiences and encompassing both life and social skills. Regardless of their performance in school, participants stories themselves as achievers in the context of this broader concept of “education” and described positive outcomes such as independence, agency, development of authentic identities and capacity to strive for and achieve goals.

These reflections have implications for the provision of social support services and the evaluation of outcomes for children who are taken into care. For example it may be valuable to redefine education to include a wider range of activities and therefore encompass a variety of potential interventions to support development and success. Expanding the definition of education is complex and in the UK we often lack the language needed to separate this type of social pedagogy to formal schooling.<sup>20</sup> The 2023 paper recommends working more closely with children in care when making decisions centring their lived experiences and drawing on their insights so as to achieve a better balance of support for both formal and informal educational opportunities. These studies spoke of the control element of getting in trouble at school, citing being in control of the outcomes of certain behaviours. One anecdote taken from this study spoke of the preference of being in isolation as a better place to get work done, and the article hypothesises the impact of being identified to peers as the a child in care and the effect that this has on behaviour.

***“this places them in the winning position.... While [they] felt there was little they could do to change the outcome [they] narrate a story which places them in the winning position. They could not change the event, but they could change the way they viewed and responses to their situation.”***

This paper also touches on the difficulty looked after children can have in forming relationships, both with their peers and with the adults in their lives. In the midst of navigating unfamiliar environments and adapting to new locations, new schools, and new caregivers, the need for social connections can take a backseat as more basic survival instincts take priority. As a result, it is fair to suggest that the forming of friendships and building social skills may be hindered. This delay in learning how to form relationships, or build trust in others, is significant when looking at how vital these relationships can be when looking at attainment (and general wellbeing). Difficulties in forming connections can hinder their ability to fully engage in the learning process; thus a holistic approach to address the social and emotional needs of looked after children in an educational setting is vital to their long-term success.

The Attendance Audit recommended that children with social workers who are excluded (temporary or permanent) should be in Alternative Provision (AP) from day one, so no child where there is a safeguarding vulnerability is ever not in school. All young carers need to be identified so that they can be fully supported.

- 7.7 Schools and educational settings may need support and require easy access to external services. A holistic approach is vital and it is important to understand from the child's point of view what is needed for a successful educational experience and actively working to create the conditions in which this can happen. This can only happen when statutory and non-statutory services work together in harmony. Emotional and learning needs are met, they feel included and invested in as an individual.
- 7.8 The Timpson Review<sup>21</sup> alongside the DfE review and report "Help, Protection, Education: Concluding the Children in Need Review" (2019)<sup>22</sup> were powerful reports with several recommendations. They have provided key drivers. For LAC attendance and attainment strategies. These being cohesive Inclusion Strategies, Exclusion Reduction Strategies, and a Team Around the School Approach.
- 7.9 Research has demonstrated the importance of a positive and supportive relationship with at least one key adult, whether at home or at school. Foster carers, teachers, and other school staff play a key role in facilitating their engagement with school. Adults also have a role to play in regard to targeted interventions. A 2012 study<sup>23</sup> found that teacher involvement and appropriate levels of carer involvement were key to increasing children's engagement. The trust the child has with their adults is vital, building up trust and support enables young people to engage with education, whereas lack of trust, particularly during educational assessments, can act as a barrier to accessing the appropriate level of education.

7.10 Research papers published in 2014<sup>24</sup> and 2019<sup>25</sup>, amongst others, have also highlighted the need for high educational aspirations and continued encouragement if young people in care are to succeed. Where self-aspirations are high amongst young people in care college admissions for the cohort are also high. Creating a culture of high aspirations and encouraging these aspirations from carers and schools staff is of vital importance, where young people feel discouraged and have low aspirations they are less likely to go into further or higher education. The next steps as suggested by the 2012 study include examining the social networks of children in care and the “othering” that can lead to social isolation, working to mitigate these factors. And also the examination and understanding of educational priorities, working to understand what educational success means to our children in care and where attainment sits within that. Is there a way to reposition or better align educational attainment as defined by grades and academic achievements with educational success as defined by children in care.

Similarly the sharing of data, and/or ease of access to data via Liquid Logic can be joined up across education, early help, and social care. Enrolment, attendance data, and exclusions and suspensions can be automatically fed to the practitioners who need to access it, as well as informing EHCP plans for LAC. The fast-paced nature of social work means that accessing information in a timely manner keeps children safe, therefore allowing practitioners real-time access allows them to get to the heart of the matter quickly and have more informed conversations that are useful to the child and family.

**Recommendation** - Team Around the School Approach – Create communication and connectedness between various bodies (i.e. family hubs and schools)

**Recommendation** - Examination of educational priorities amongst the borough’s LAC

**Recommendation** – Examine social networks of LAC that can lead to social isolation

**Recommendation** – Look at data sharing practices between Social Care, Early Help, and Education

## 8. Attainment and Attendance

- 8.1 Poor attendance and persistent absenteeism can have significant detrimental impacts on students' educational attainment. When students regularly miss school, they miss out on crucial learning opportunities and instructional time. Over time increased absence can result in gaps in knowledge that become increasingly difficult to catch up. Furthermore persistent absenteeism can result in a disconnect between students and their school community, leading to social isolation, the impact of which has already been discussed, this makes it harder to build relationships and therefore access support. The lack of engagement results in a diminished sense of belonging. The consequences of which are that pupils with attendance issues are more likely to fall behind, achieve worse grades overall, and face barriers to achieving their full potential. Everyone involved in caring for children including schools, social care, healthcare workers, and community partners, are responsible to prioritise and support children's attendance.

The children's commissioner launched an attendance audit across every council in 2022 and found a dearth of data, in many cases where there was attendance data it was either fragmented, but more often it was simply non-existent. In the Autumn of 2021 school census 1.7 million children nationally were regularly absent from school, which is almost a quarter of all students. For comparison, in 2018/19 this number was 1 in 9. There are not typically accurate real-time figures of how many students there are in England, let alone the number of children who are not receiving an education.

The report found that the reasons for children's exclusions are often highly individual and complex, so it is important that the reasons are fully explored with proper engagement with children and their families. It formed six different ambitions to address the issue of persistent absenteeism.

1. Ask, Listen, Communicate: decisions about children's education to be made with children, their families, and other adults in their lives.
2. Meet children where they are: all children receive support in schools and in families around schools
3. Exclusion as a trigger for intervention: children should receive a fantastic education regardless of setting, and should receive targeted support following exclusion or suspension.
4. Letting children be children: no child should feel that they have to miss school in order to provide support or care for their family.
5. Attendance is everyone's business: school leaders have a relentless focus on attendance and work together with LAs to ensure children are supported to be in school and attend regularly.
6. No more "known unknowns": lack of information should no longer be a reason why children are not receiving a suitable education.

8.2 School attendance has worsened since the pandemic. This in part is understandably due to new attitudes towards student illnesses, the idea that an unwell student should stay home to ensure that they do not spread their illness further. Similarly the increase in parents who work from home or have the option to do so at short notice means that a child is less likely to be sent in whilst sick as childcare has become more flexible. However more children are persistently absent or dropping out of school altogether. The lack of real-time data regarding student absenteeism makes the issue harder to address.

8.3 Children who are not receiving suitable education are potentially exposed to higher degrees of risk and this may include engagement in anti-social or criminal behaviour and social disengagement. The local authority has a duty to find out who these children are and make sure they are receiving the correct support. It's important for everyone involved, including parents, carers, schools, and other organisations to work together to ensure that children are safe and receiving a good education. If a child is not attending school without a good reason, it could be a sign that something is wrong, the responsibility of schools to keep students safe means that these unexplained absences should be investigated, and records/a database maintained to identify any patterns or trends that can then be addressed.

The results of the attendance audit recommended that services work together to ensure children's attendance and recommends specific actions, such as creating a young carers policy in schools and involving schools in local safeguarding partnerships.

It also highlights the need for better data collection to prevent children from falling through the cracks, and for support to happen year-round meaning that pupils can prepare for the upcoming school year and feel that their care and support is consistent.

8.4 Nationally there may be thousands of students who are not in contact with public services and may not have access to necessary support or education. Some students feel that schools don't explain why they are being excluded or punished for poor attendance. The report found that students want to be involved in developing attendance policies, as they felt they had better insight into what they need, as opposed to be told conflicting things by adults and school staff.

School leaders have emphasised the importance of a coordinated approach to pastoral care, including mental health support, attendance monitoring, and behaviour management. They stress the need for a "team around the school" and ongoing connections/partnerships with, for example, family hubs.

- 8.5 When it comes to exclusions the attendance audit makes clear the need for a well communicated plan for reintegration into mainstream schooling; it suggests that exclusions should be seen as an opportunity to assess a child's needs and implement a plan designed to address their behaviour, as opposed to being strictly punitive. Safeguarding concerns should trigger referrals to appropriate support services and effective communication between schools and external services should be in place. The use of AP and part-time timetables should be carefully considered and time-limited with regular reviews of progress. The text also called for improved quality and accountability in the AP sector, with properly trained staff and resources.
- 8.6 Policy in Practice found during their research that many carers don't identify as such, and therefore miss out on support that is owed to them, the attendance audit emphasised the important of identifying children missing school due to caring responsibilities or family pressures. Young carers often struggle to communicate their situation to their teachers and therefore do not end up getting the support that they need. Reasonable adjustments, such as allowing them to bring their phones to school in order to check in on family members, could support young carers in staying in and being engaged with school.

Many schools in Tameside have a Young Carers Policy in place, it is important that this policy is clearly signposted, and that young carers are involved in its development, the voices of lived experience being essential in making sure that vital support is not neglected due to ignorance. Policies should clearly set expectations and address: What support will be made available; how the school will respond to the bullying of young carers, who the dedicated adult and/or carers champion is and how to approach them or identify themselves as young carers, and that there can be adaptations made to ensure that they can fully dedicate themselves to their education.

- 8.6 Whilst the general attitude from government and educational institutions is that attendance is the priority, there is a growing movement towards attendance, and particularly attendance awards and goals, being punitive to children with disabilities and/or health conditions. A chronically ill child is, for example, much less likely than their peers to achieve a perfect attendance score, and forcing them to attend when they are unwell can also have detrimental impacts on their attendance. It is therefore worth emphasising that attendance cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach but rather a series of flexible policies and resources that can adapt to suit the children they are designed to help.

A community college in Cambridgeshire has created a special hub for students who are struggling with anxiety due to the covid pandemic. The hub provided a more relaxed environment and targeted support for students dealing with behavioural and mental health issues. Students at the hub have praised the individual attention they received from teachers and the practical activities that they were able to participate in.

**Recommendation** – Include young carers in the production of Young Carers' Strategies

**Recommendation** – Include children and young people in the development of absence and exclusion strategies

**Recommendation** – Involve schools in local safeguarding partnerships

**Recommendation** – Create child-friendly versions school policies that children and young people can access and understand

**Recommendation** – Move away from attendance awards and/or counter them with an equal option so students who cannot achieve them will not become further discouraged

## 9. Conclusion

- 9.1 In conclusion, whilst Tameside has many strengths, particularly in post-lockdown reading recovery and lower gender gaps in educational attainment, significant disparities still exist and persist. Students with disabilities face inconsistent accessibility plans and delays in support, exacerbating absenteeism and hindering academic progress. EAL students encounter language proficiency barriers, impacting their educational outcomes. Gender disparities, though smaller in Tameside, still reflect broader societal issues influencing subject choices and higher education representation. The lack of specific data on LGBTQ+ students' attainment highlights the need for target policies and support systems to combat bullying and promote inclusivity.
- 9.2 Socio-economic factors across all equality groups remain a critical determinant of educational success, with poverty and economic instability severely affecting students' academic performances. Looked After Children continue to struggle with lower attainment, necessitating a cohesive support strategy involving all stakeholders. Attendance, a fundamental prerequisite for academic success, is undermined by chronic absenteeism linked to various underlying issues. Whilst this demonstrates the need for collaborative interventions and inclusive policies, it also demonstrates the need for a conversation of what "attendance" can look like.
- 9.3 The recommendations proposed address these disparities, advocating for standardised accessibility plans, targeted language support, racial bias training, gender-specific interventions, enhanced support for LGBTQ+ students, socio-emotional development programmes, and improved communication between social care and educational institutions. These recommendations aim to create a more equitable educational environment in the borough, ensuring all students have the opportunity to achieve their potential.

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